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'An invitation to listen differently'

Composer Peter Hatch takes opera to the streets of Stratford, Ont., with a three-day sound-event that riffs on the Pied Piper tale

Colin EatockFrom Friday's Globe and Mail
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Peter Hatch

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Composers never know for sure how audiences will react to a new work. But when Peter Hatch's new "street opera" *MyAudia* is premiered by Stratford Summer Music on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, he won't be sure how many of the people who hear it will even know it's there. And that's just fine with him.

"There's always a variety of audiences in an urban-intervention work," says the 53-year-old, Waterloo-based composer. "There will be people who find themselves in the middle of a guerrilla sound-event without knowing what it is."

Urban intervention? Guerrilla sound-event? Hatch talks like that. And for the last five years, he's been bringing his music out of the traditional concert hall for unannounced performances in public spaces. For instance, in 2004 in Regina, he presented *The Foggiest Idea*, in which an unseen tuba could be heard throughout a shopping mall. And on Toronto Island in 2006 he staged his *Cell Life*, for four singers singing into cellphones.

"Some people would perk up their ears and be really intrigued by what they were hearing," he recalls. "And there were others who just went about their business."

As for what will happen in Stratford when *MyAudia* unfolds there, at various times over three days, Hatch coyly drops a few hints.

"If you come Friday night, you'll be able to hear almost everything from anywhere in downtown Stratford. On Saturday it's similar, but the action is centred more in one specific place. On Sunday, it's a more traditional, located performance, behind City Hall, but then it moves somewhere else. Some scenes move through an area, and they have no real beginning or end – they fade in and out of what's already there." (Up-to-date information on the show's comings and goings will be available at www.myaudia.com, and through Twitter and text messaging.)

MyAudia is the product of a collaboration between Hatch and librettist John Sobol. Together, they constructed the opera's scenes around a central premise: the sudden return to the modern world of the children the Pied Piper stole from the town of Hamelin, centuries ago. The cast consists of four vocal soloists and two children's choirs, and there's also an oboe, a tuba and percussion.

The fairy-tale subject matter might lead some people to assume that *MyAudia* is a children's show – but that's not a label Hatch wants to use. "Kids are very open in their reactions to sound events. They don't say, 'That belongs in a concert hall.' But the piece isn't specifically aimed at kids."

In fact, as Hatch tells it, the plot was something of an afterthought in the creative process. "The piece evolved in an interesting way. The story came later – the idea of the Pied Piper, and his magical sonic powers."

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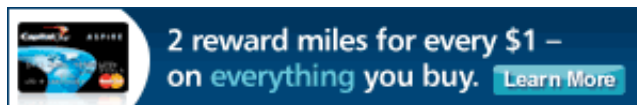
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