



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

*An Operatic*  
**GAME-CHANGER**

**THE OPERA MAKER AS GAME DESIGNER  
AND THE POTENTIALS  
OF LUDO-IMMERSIVE OPERA**

av

Hedvig Jalhed

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen  
i scenisk gestaltning vid Högskolan för scen och musik,  
Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av  
Konstnärliga fakultetens dekan offentligt kommer att försvaras

Fredagen den 18 februari 2022 kl. 10.00  
i Lingsalen, A505, på Högskolan för Scen och musik,  
Artisten, Fågelsången 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent:  
Dr John Potter, Reader Emeritus,  
University of York, UK

Disputationen föregås av en scenisk gestaltning av Hedvig Jalhed  
torsdagen den 17 februari 2022 kl. 18.00–19.30  
i Malmgrensalen, A304, på Högskolan för Scen och Musik,  
Artisten, Fågelsången 1, Göteborg.

**Title:** An Operatic Game Changer: The Opera Maker as Game Designer and the Potentials of Ludo-Immersive Opera

**Author:** Hedvig Jalhed

**Language:** English with summary in Swedish

**Keywords:** artistic research, opera, interaction, immersion, performance, perception, game design, participation, spectatorship, aesthetics, Apollonian, Dionysian

**ISBN (printed version):** 978-91-8009-608-9

**ISBN (digital edition):** 978-91-8009-609-6

**URL:** <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/70289>

How can live-performed chamber operas be conceptualized as immersive games with interactive features? This artistic study has resulted in a system model through which degrees of immersion may be generated and analyzed from physical, social, and psychical stimuli. A differentiation of immersive modes has been made possible by the framing of opera-making as game design. The findings indicate that so-called ludo-immersive opera could be developed into operatic chamber opera play for self-reliant participants, constituting an intimate and alternate practice in which dynamic game-masters may replace supervising directors. However, this practice is entangled with the question of future training for operatic practitioners outside the mainstream opera format, and beyond both Wagnerian and Brechtian spectatorship. The shift from the traditional audience/performer relationship to a novel form of immersive interaction requires a new mind-set and preparation for opera practitioners, to encourage autonomy and active participation by individual visitors.

Theoretically, the study connects recent innovations in opera to the aesthetic principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian and positions ludo-immersive opera in relation to these. The principles bridge immersion, opera, and game-playing, articulated by a reinterpretation of Roger Caillois' taxonomy of play. The issue of immersion as an artistic aim in opera is highlighted. Moreover, artists' and visitors' reciprocal participation in ludo-immersive opera is discussed in regard to its historical context of operatic event-making and forms of presentation.

The project explores the detailed consequences of perception and performance in chamber opera with ludic and immersive features, primarily inspired by live-action role playing. The main objective has been to investigate how operatic events can be presented as immersive adventures rather than spectacles, and consequences that the integration of playing visitors in professional opera implies for artistic practice.

In four operas created during the period 2016–2020, interventions and encounters between artists and visitors in musically driven situations framed by fictional settings have been staged and studied. The artistic researcher has iteratively been engaged in action as opera singer, librettist, dramaturge, and director. Data from the research cycles include field recordings from the productions and reports from the participants in the form of interviews and surveys.