

A FANTASY OPERA BY IRMIN SCHMIDT



Gormenghast



Irmin Schmidt, founder of the legendary group CAN, has written an opera: GORMENGHAST. Commissioned by Wuppertaler Bühnen, the work was performed in the English language and premiered at the Operahouse Wuppertal on 15. November 1998.

Inspired by Mervyn Peake's masterpiece of gothic fantasy, English novelist **Duncan Fallowell** wrote the libretto in St. Petersburg, combining romance, comedy and futurism into an adventure of epic strangeness peopled by unforgettable characters.

The opera is in 3 acts and centres on the rise and fall of Steerpike, a courageous, clever and charming kitchen-boy who becomes by degrees the murderous tyrant of Gormenghast Castle and its domain. In the process he bewitches and destroys Fuchsia the daughter of Gormenghast's opium-addicted ruler. Finally he meets his own dramatic death. The other inhabitants of this vivid decaying realm are drawn into the terrible tale.

Irmin Schmidt, who studied under Ligeti and Stockhausen, not only created in CAN one of the most influential of avant garde groups, but is also a classical conductor and pianist and has composed music for over 70 film productions. His work transforms elements of the popular, ethnic and classical into a wholly original musical language .

In both libretto and music, this integration of high culture and popular culture is not like anything which has gone before: it is achieved with perfect naturalness, carrying the art of opera forward into a new phase. The result is both accessible and magically unexpected: GORMENGHAST is a major addition to the world of musical theatre.

Dedicated to George Reinhart in memoriam

Gormenghast



GORMENGHAST

World Premiere: Wuppertal Operahouse, 15. November 1998
Schillertheater NRW

Musical Director: **Simon Rekers**
Director: **Michael Sturminger**
Stage-design & costume: **Renate Martin and Andreas Donhauser**
Choreography: **Bennie Voorhaar**
Dramaturgy: **Martin Griesemer**
Live sound engineer: **Thomas Dickmeis**

Lord Sepulchrave: the Earl of Groan (lyric baritone)
Mark Morouse
Lady Gertrude: the Countess of Groan (dramatic mezzo soprano)
Danielle Grima
Fuchsia: the daughter (soprano)
Claudia Visca
Titus: the son (dancer, pantomine)
Jakob Fedler / Thomas Hartung
The Twins : sisters of the Earl of Groan (coloratura sopranos)
Cora : **Elise Kaufman**
Clarice: **Sabine Schnitzer**
Barquentine: the Master of Rituals (tenor, rock singer)
Ulrich Wewelsiep
Steerpike: the kitchen boy (tenor, rock singer)
Stefan Vinzberg
Dr. Prunesquallor: the court physician (countertenor)
Reiner Beinghaus
Flay: the Earl's manservant (actor)
Markus Dietz
Swelter: the kitchen master (lyric tenor)
Markus Heinrich / Florian Simson
Nanny Slagg: the children's nurse (actress)
Walter Theil



Pre-recorded material including performances by: **Brandenburger Symphoniker**

percussion **Jaki Liebezeit**
guitar **Michael Karoli**
cello **Matthias Lorenz**
voice **Jessica Wynne**

Boys choir Hampstead School - London
directed by : **Diedre Broadbent**

The original recordings with the Wuppertal Sinfonieorchester could not be used.

They have been replaced by the
Brandenburger Symphoniker
conducted by **Irmin Schmidt**
recorded by **Jono Podmore**

October 1999 in Brandenburg, Germany.
Mastered by Miles Showell at Metropolis,
London.

The orchestral recordings and the performances
in Wuppertal and Gelsenkirchen have been
generously supported by Musicstore, Köln.

Special thanks to:
Holk Freitag, Martin Griesemer, Albert Lohmar,
Sebastian Peake, Hansgeorg Schneider.

Stage photography Wuppertal Operahouse:
Rudolf Finkes
Orchestral recording photography:
Hildegard Schmidt
Design:
Werner Richter

Gormenghast is a gigantic castle, ancient and labyrinthine. A world unto itself – and like all fantasy worlds, which deal with myths and history – it's an image of ours.

The story is a Gothic tale of wild beauty, concerning the rise and fall of the kitchenboy Steerpike, a parable of power and seduction, of the eternal return of tyranny, whereby youth's rebellious dreams of a better world are corrupted by the lust for power and twisted into murder and destruction.

And so images of our history appear in all the poetic, comic and fantastic guises of the characters, eg. Steerpike as the incarnation of utter rationalism, of self-obsessed urges which inevitably lead to destruction of traditional culture, ancient wisdom and ultimately nature.

But fantasy is also a play on myths and Steerpike also a mythical hero, who, akin to the trickster, provokes chaos in order to bring about the transformation of an exhausted system.

The scenario, which I developed from the epic scope of the novel, condenses Steerpike's tale into a series of scenes (based on Peake's tableaux) that follow a strict and almost ritual pattern.

Three acts, each separated by a period of seven years.

The sequence and location of the scenes in the first act are inversely mirrored in the third act, but there they have become scenes of decay, devastation or magical transformation.

The second act is symmetrically mirrored in itself.

I.	II.	III.
1. Lady Gertrude's chamber	1. Library	1. The Tree of the Twins
2. The Great Kitchen		2. Fuchsia's bedroom
3. Facade	2. Facade	3. Facade
4. Fuchsia's bedroom		4. The Great Kitchen
5. The Tree of the Twins	3. Library (burned)	5. Lady Gertrude's chamber

The final form of the scenario was completed in co-operation with Klaus Emmerich and Claus Henneberg.

Duncan Fallowell has taken this formal rigidity and breathed into it vitality and rhythmic flow laced with grotesque comedy, dark poetry, crazy frolics and sombre drama. A libretto that is a composer's delight. A wealth of inspiring images with a diverse blend of formal, contextual and symbolic associations and relationships. Above all, it's a singers text, almost completely rhymed, bursting with melodic intonation and furious rhythms: *his words dance*.



My music is basically rhythm-orientated; the groove holds together a diversity of styles. The soundscape is unusual. The orchestra was recorded and reprocessed in order to reach a sound continuum in which electronic and natural sounds blend or transform into each other. The percussion is also a complex mix of traditional (also ethnic) instruments, objects such as stones, logs, china, metal etc. and synthetic sounds, such as samples, breakbeats. All in all this produces a rich and original soundworld.

In performance this prerecorded mix is enhanced by the addition of a string quartett (obligatory) and a percussionist (ad lib). The pre-production has been in collaboration with soundengineer and programmer **Jono Podmore**, whose own solowork under the name KUMO belongs to the drum 'n bass avantgarde. He has intertwined and enriched my music with fresh and current ideas, especially in the development of the rhythms and grooves.

All parts are sung, there is never any spoken dialogue, melisma are rare except for the bizarre strains of the Twins and Prunesquallor. Steerpike sings rock songs; the Earl-turned-owl intones a romantic impressionistic kunstlied that floats on clouds of electronic sound; Fuchsia sings dreamy and tragic ballads; Barquentine roars out a wild rocker about chaos; the Twins twitter madly through musical history. Musical styles – or the remnants of them – are juxtaposed in abrupt succession. Nevertheless, there are also melodies that serve as leitmotifs and give shape to the characters, and there are other motifs, harmonic associations and single chords, all of which weave a net of relationships and meanings.

In Gormenghast there is no such thing as "normal" behaviour: every gesture and movement is carried out in a more or less stylised or ritualised manner, creating forms of dance.

Steerpike prances in frenzied rapture at being liberated from his kitchen confines, performs acrobatic tricks to impress Fuchsia, or assumes the form of the Grim Reaper to subdue the Twins. In the final duet with Gertrude, his evil rooster dance culminates in rage and madness. Fuchsia dances back into her secret world of dreams, yearning for a brighter life. The Twins skip, trip and fidget around like a couple of crazed marionettes, Barquentine stamps out a frenetic ritual dance on the tabletop, Swelter fences a whirling war dance at his rival Flay. At the end of the first act the Twins, Fuchsia, Prunesquallor and Steerpike perform a romping dance number on the tree overhanging the abyss. And of course, all rituals are grotesque group dance numbers.

Gormenghast is, both in spirit and form, Grand Opera. But elements and characteristics of Musical, the rock concert, and modern dance theatre play equally important roles within it. A new genre? In order to preserve the wondrous form of opera we have to explore ever new possibilities to transform it. This is what I've tried to do. Therefore I call Gormenghast, simply, a Fantasy Opera.

Irmin Schmidt







GERTRUDE'S ARIA: Touch

2 I always knew
It to be true
That touch calms body and soul.
Hand and paw,
Tentacle and claw,
Such differences disappear,
And with them fear –
Because touch stops thought,
Produces clear sensation,
Dissolving the illusion of separation.

Touch is soft is
Light is lightning is
Thunder is darkness is
Blood is food is
Breast is breath is
Sky is light is life

Oh, the bless
Of a caress!
Touch another well
And you touch all
In the universal
Circle
Of touch.

SWELTER'S ARIA: Be A Happy Carnivore!

3 I love eating meat,
From brains down to trotters and feet,
Beef fillets and faggots and pheasant with maggots
And birds that once whistled tweet-tweet;
Chop, sever, and stab,
Up to your eyes in gore,
Carve, dribble, and jab –
Be a happy carnivore!

I swoon at the thought
Of thighs simmered in port
Or a quivering portion
Of pallid abortion
(Because veal to be right
Must be unborn and white),
With veg round the edge
To assist the excreta
Of this humble meat-eater.

But my favourite joy
Is a succulent, untruculent boy
Who worships work – and who simply adores me!
Disobedience thoroughly bores me!
So if anyone dares to forgo the passion
Of pulling together, he'll be gutted and stuffed
And cooked in a vile but artistic fashion
With a pear in his mouth and the pastry all puffed,
Plus – veg round the edge
To assist the excreta
Of this tender meat-eater,
Though I have to regret
I've not crossed the abyssm
Of cannibalism
Just yet!

I love eating meat,
From brains down to trotters and feet,
Beef fillets and faggots and pheasant with maggots
And birds that once whistled tweet-tweet.

STEERPIKE'S SONG: Oxygen

4 The sun ...
The sun ...

The sun
All round me like a joke;
The sky
All round me like a cloak;
Suddenly
My life awoke
And gave me oxygen.
The fun
In climbing to the topmost tower;
So high
I tremble like a mountain flower;
Suddenly
I feel the sweetest power –
I'm drunk on oxygen!

Impossible – crazy –
Horizons are hazy –
Solid stone floats in an air serene:
For a thousand years this battlement has been
Waiting for me,
Waiting for me!
I think I'm going to faint ...
No! Never! Never!

Up with the larks,
A head filled with sparks,
Ten thousand winking windows at my feet,
My field of vision celestial, complete:
No more dreams,
No more dreams
I think I'm going to laugh!

The sun
All round me like a joke;
The sky
All round me like a cloak;
The fun
In climbing to the topmost tower;
So high
I tremble like a mountain flower;
The mind
Escaping from a smoky den;
The body
Free to move just how or when;
The world
Will never be the same again!
I'm drunk on oxy
foxy
jokey jocksy
rocksy
unblocksy
peacocksy
shockingly shocksy
no more forelocksy
ox...y...gen!



FUCHSIA'S SONG: Rainbow Party

At evening they drift
 To a rainbow party
 Down by the river shady and wide,
 The river that flows
 In a serpentine tango
 Past blue-headed hills to the green satin tide.

Yellow eyes glow
 Under lids indigo;
 Shoulders are spangled with meteor dust;

Quips can be heard
 Pranked with words
 Like »flamingo«, »synthetic«, »abhor« and »entrust«.

Lonely . . . or laughing like a doublet
 With a naughty clown –
 Everything mixes but not into grey.

The black spotted sun
 Sinks like a bun,
 Splashing the sky with a leopardskin light:

A question mark drips
 From its tangerine lips
 But is crushed by the bosom of burgeoning night.

Mandolins croon
 To the violet moon.
 Thin-wristed lovers share baskets of fruits.

Between fingers and thumbs
 Red swollen plums
 Are breaking like blisters all down their new suits.

Fire . . . fireworks festoon.
 Night passes too soon
 With witchery, rapture, desire and dismay.

Then on the horizons
 The doctors in phaetons
 Assemble at daybreak to take them away.

ENSEMBLE: Joy

FUCHSIA:
 Some systems are a frightful bore;
 They cut with jagged edge.

STEERPIKE:
 Components crack or disappear –
 Found bleeding in a hedge.

PRUNESQUALLOR:
 But here we all co-operate.
 No horrors do afflict us.

STEERPIKE:
 Like clockwork every function,
 So-o-o-o-o-o

PRUNESQUALLOR:
 Display an enormous rictus!

ALL:
 Yes, everything looks sweet;
 Let's prance with goaty feet!

CORA:
 Some people

CLARICE:
 Are a

TWINS:
 Frightful bore.

FUCHSIA:
 They look like walking goitres

STEERPIKE:
 Or throbbing pustules fit to burst

PRUNESQUALLOR:
 Or flu that ever loiters.

FUCHSIA:
 But life is quick and must excite.

STEERPIKE:
 Good fortune it has picked us.

TWINS:
 With lips all painted royal purple.

ALL:
 Display an enormous rictus!
 Yes, everything looks sweet.
 Let's prance with goaty feet!

STEERPIKE:
 Some futures are a frightful bore.

FUCHSIA:
 Thwarted every need.

PRUNESQUALLOR:
 Some futures simply don't exist.

ALL:
 But ours are guaranteed.

PRUNESQUALLOR:
 Arm in arm but not in army –
 Coercion hasn't kicked us.
 Co-operation is voluntary,
 So-o-o-o-o-o-o-o

ALL:
 Display an enormous rictus.
 Arm in arm but not in army –
 Coercion hasn't kicked us.
 Co-operation is voluntary, so-o-o-o-o-o-o-o
 Display an enormous rictus!
 Display an enormous rictus!
 Display an enormous rictus!

THE TWINS' DUET: Triumph

TWINS:
 Triumph!
 We turned the key!
 Justice!
 Leaves shall sprout upon the tree!
 Orchestra,
 Set the pelvis free!
 Champagne to toast the flame!

CORA:
 Already I feel my neck longer.
 CLARICE:
 Not longer than mine.
 CORA:
 The head moves back, followed by the
 shoulders, then the spine

CLARICE:
 Which stretches, becomes stronger.
 CORA:
 I'm haughtier than you.
 CLARICE:
 Call that haughty? Behold a professional
 – notice the fingers

CORA:
 Splayed over the hips
 CLARICE:
 And the pitiless
 CORA:
 Pitiless!

CLARICE:
 Pitiless curve of the lips
 CORA:
 Framing an impossible
 CLARICE:
 Impossible!

CORA:
 Command.
 CLARICE:
 Such as
 CORA:
 Such as?

CLARICE:
 Don't confuse me!
 CORA:
 Precisely!
 CLARICE:
 I'm haughtier than you.

CORA:
 Call that haughty? Behold a professional.
 TWINS:
 Triumph!
 We turned the key!
 Justice!

Leaves shall sprout upon the tree!
 Orchestra,
 Set the pelvis free!
 Champagne to – aaaaaaaagh!!!!!!!!!!!!

BARQUENTINE'S ARIA: Possess Me, Chaos!

*I failed the Groans!
Failed the Groans!*

*Possess me, Chaos,
Disorder enter me
Gormenghast to save
And I shall carry
Disorder to the grave.
I shall die,
Rotten luck,
But death of me
Heals the Book.
Havoc, havoc, havoc, havoc, havoc!*

*Possess me, Chaos,
So there is a space
For a successor
Whose face
Is not that of transgressor.
I shall die,
Rotten luck,
But death of me
Heals the Book.
Havoc, havoc, havoc, havoc, havoc!*

SEPULCHRAVE'S ARIA: Behold The Night!

*SEPULCHRAVE:
Behold the night!
How sweet it is to rise and loll upon the midnight breeze,
To fly obliquely through a ring of moons, reverse
And hover weightless, or sit immobile
in the moon-painted trees,
Resolving the universe.*

*Behold the night!
Tender the liquid litany of unlit space,
Of darkness which has no edge, no fixed forms,
Whose mysterious embrace
Is various and total, whose polymorphous kiss transforms.*

*FUCHSIA:
Father! I do not know you!*

*SEPULCHRAVE:
Where is Swelter?*

*Behold the night!
Infinite! Close
Look – there – the final question has burst
Like the breast of a lark
And the last word, like the first,
Returns to the dark.*

*Good-bye to words, to time, to age,
To rocks.
At last I have arisen from the page
And float over banks of night-scented stocks.
I am warm now.
I am round. I can hear my blood flow
Softly.
I am free. I am lovely.*

*Swelter, please do not forget
I am a carnivore
Bring me here a dozen mice
And later a dozen more.
Alive!*



DUET FUCHSIA & STEERPIKE: The Birds Are Leaving For The South

STEERPIKE:

*This never knowing, how I hate it!
Say you will be mine.
Let us go to Gertrude now.*

FUCHSIA:

*I am waiting for you to reach me –
You are too uneasy inside.
I am waiting for you to open –
You are still too lost.*

STEERPIKE:

You are cruel – if you know my feelings.

FUCHSIA:

*Do you know mine?
Yes, you know everyone's.
You are too vigilant to love!
I have never seen you
Subside into a dreamy, self-forgetful state.
You have never trusted me,
Or anyone, enough for that.*

STEERPIKE:

*It is not easy for me.
I must move!
I must make!
But I do have a dream
You are part of my dream.*

FUCHSIA:

*You have schemes, not dreams.
To dream you must surrender.
Dreaming and loving are close.
The lasting monuments are made with love.*

STEERPIKE:

No – they are built with passion!

FUCHSIA:

Oh, passion! Passion is too short!

FUCHSIA:

They ... belong ... to Mother.

STEERPIKE:

*I am not afraid of her.
I am afraid of no one!
Except – only a little now – of you.
I know you love me, I know it!
Say yes you do. For once say yes.
Say it!*

FUCHSIA:

*Yes!...
But if we love each other,
Why am I not happy?
Why do I feel cold?*

STEERPIKE:

*Because you are the one afraid to surrender.
Why do you torture me?
At night I am kept awake
By the thought of your body against mine.*

FUCHSIA:

Stop it, stop it!

STEERPIKE:

*I cannot.
I shall not.
It is a beautiful thought.
But I am sick of it!
Always you are there inside me,
Eating away.
And outside – you are with Titus more than with me!*

FUCHSIA:

*Stop shouting!
And go away –
I expect my brother shortly.
I do not want to be part ... of your dream.*

STEERPIKE:

So am I to be your severed foot?

FUCHSIA:

*Power is male, secrecy is female –
Where do you find these mad ideas?*

STEERPIKE:

*You know nothing of life!
Dreams, games, caprice, hurt feelings!
Is this all you are?
And you propose to lecture me!*

FUCHSIA:

*What are you, Steerpike?
Tell me plainly.*

STEERPIKE:

I am ... I am the creator of a new world.

FUCHSIA:

*Ah!
It is too much.
And too little.*

STEERPIKE:

*Fuchsia,
Let me
Kiss you.*

FUCHSIA:

You kissed me yesterday.

STEERPIKE:

Please. Now. Please.

FUCHSIA:

*Let us release the doves out of the window.
Have you noticed the birds are leaving for the south?
It is strange.
It is not their time.
I begin to hate you*

STEERPIKE:

This is not how it should be.

FUCHSIA:

Steerpike ... let us end it altogether.

STEERPIKE:

What are you saying?

FUCHSIA:

It is no good.

STEERPIKE:

*But you are my only warmth!
If you reject me, I shall – I shall –
You shall not!*

FUCHSIA:

*There will never be joy in it, only pain.
I can see that now.
If you must have an answer –
The answer is no.*

STEERPIKE:

No, no, no, no, no,

FUCHSIA:

Did you kill my father?

STEERPIKE:

How could you even think it?

FUCHSIA:

*I don't think he left us...
It does not matter now.*

STEERPIKE:

*You!
Your sister loves me!
She will always love me!
She is mine now!
Mine!*



FUCHSIA'S ARIA: Fall, Friendly Rain

1
A tall-masted ship is approaching this place,
Slowly, in a soft careen.
White sails full, it moves with an inexorable grace
Past crag and ravine.
Between mountains and gorsey hills it sails ahead,
Cleaving the forest,
Sliding through twisted woods under skies of lead,
And across fields of waste.

Fall, friendly rain,
In sheets, not in showers.
Fall, friendly rain.
Without you there are no flowers.
Snowdrop and bluebell, wave good-bye to me.

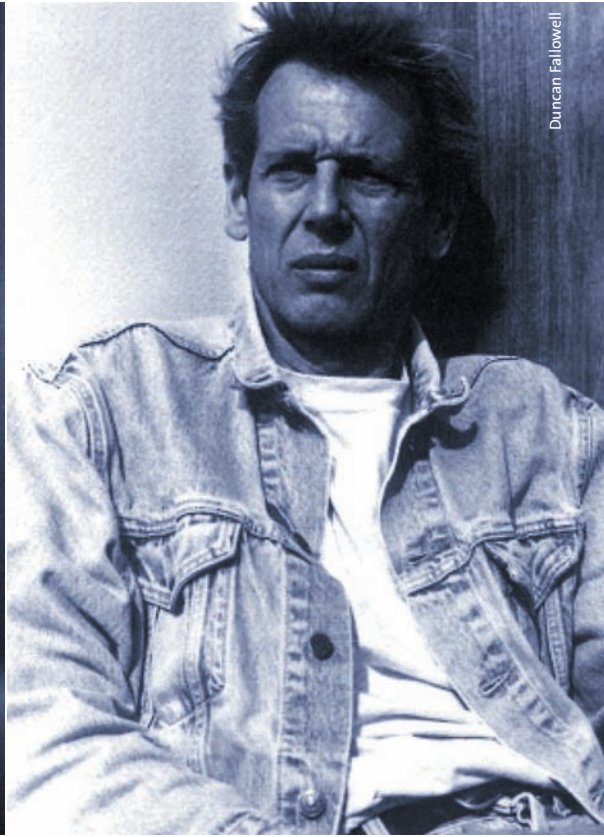
A tall-masted ship is heaving in sight,
Floating into the park,
Over the lawns, firing rockets of light
To erase the dark,
Gliding right up to the castle, almost as high,
Waiting there patiently,
Slurping against the battlements, creaking against the sky,
Waiting for me
To step aboard whenever I choose, any day,
Waiting to take me away.

Fall, friendly rain,
In sheets, not in showers.
Fall, friendly rain.
Without you there are no flowers.
Snowdrop and bluebell, wave good-bye to me.





Irmin Schmidt



Duncan Fallowell



Jono Podmore



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Extracts from the Fantasy Opera GORMENGHAST

Music and scenario : **Irmin Schmidt**
Libretto : **Duncan Fallowell** inspired by **Mervyn Peake's** trilogy
Sound engineer and programmer: **Jono Podmore**
Produced by : **Irmin Schmidt** and **Jono Podmore**

with the singers of the World Premiere (Wuppertal Operahouse, Schillertheater NRW) recorded live in performance.
Musical Director: **Simon Rekers**
and the **Brandenburger Symphoniker** conducted by **Irmin Schmidt**

A phantasmagorical soundworld of electronics, symphony orchestra and pounding beats which envelopes singers who effortlessly stretch from Pop to Classical virtuosity.

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Rodney Milnes • THE TIMES • 24.11.1998

1. OVERTURE		00:54
2. GERTRUDE'S ARIA: <i>Touch</i>	Danielle Grima	09:23
3. SWELTER'S ARIA: <i>Be A Happy Carnivore!</i>	Florian Simson	06:15
4. STEERPIKE'S SONG: <i>Oxygen</i>	Stefan Vinzberg	07:01
5. FUCHSIA'S SONG: <i>Rainbow Party</i>	Claudia Visca	06:52
6. ENSEMBLE: <i>Joy</i>	Claudia Visca, Elise Kaufman, Sabine Schnitzer, Stefan Vinzberg, Reiner Beinghaus	03:23
7. THE TWINS' DUET: <i>Triumph</i>	Elise Kaufman, Sabine Schnitzer	03:07
8. BARQUENTINE'S ARIA: <i>Possess Me, Chaos!</i>	Ulrich Wewelsjep	02:14
9. SEPULCHRAVE'S ARIA: <i>Behold The Night!</i>	Mark Morouse	09:44
10. DUET FUCHSIA & STEERPIKE: <i>The Birds Are Leaving For The South</i>	Claudia Visca, Stefan Vinzberg	06:45
11. FUCHSIA'S ARIA: <i>Fall, Friendly Rain</i>	Claudia Visca	05:48

Gormenghast