

## “The Computer Kid’s Magic Night”; Finally, An Opera About Kids and Technology

There has been a great deal of discussion, among those in the opera community (Note: I am not addressing developers of the Opera search engine), about how to interest young people in the art form. The question is rhetorical, and we all know the answer: “Make opera relevant to today’s youth.” Easier said than done.

The smallest kids still enjoy “Hansel und Gretel” (Humperdinck), “Noyes Fludde” (Britten) and “Amahl and the Night Visitors” (Menotti). There are newer entries to the repertoire: “The Little Prince” (Portman), “Brundibar” (Krasa) and “Where the Wild Things Are” (Knussen). What all these pieces have in common is the propensity to limit thematic material to traditional or classic children’s stories and simple moral themes. That’s all good, but does modern treatment of an old story make it modern or relevant? From my perspective, as a parent, writer and singer, relevance must reside in the *subject matter*, not in its treatment.

There can be no more relevant topic for millennial families than our engagement with technology. Studies have been done, books have been written, online forums exist about this topic that is so challenging to the modern family. The term “screen time” sums up our conundrum with regard to the influence of technology on our kids.

So, I ask you: Has this relevant, modern topic ever been the subject of an opera?

If your answer is “No,” I am very happy to be able to reply, “You are *wrong!*”

As it happens, the subject features prominently in Joann E. Feldman’s “The Computer Kid’s Magic Night.” If you are surprised to learn this, you will be equally astonished to learn that this 50 minute opera is listed in OPERA America’s Opera For Youth Directory and that it had its premier in 1986. That’s no typo, folks.

Full disclosure: I saw the premier of this opera. My future husband had been cast in the production, offered at Sonoma State University, so I attended. A show about computers and kids! Wow! I found the music to be charming and engaging, the story clever and full of fun. At that time, I was a recent university graduate. I would not own a personal computer for another 5 years (a second-hand Macintosh Plus); I had typed all my school papers on an Underwood typewriter. The very thought of computers becoming ubiquitous, much less more seductive than television, was something I just couldn’t fathom (mainly because I didn’t play videogames and had had very little exposure to computers during my university days). But, I remember thinking, as I watched this show, “How *prescient* of the author/composer to have seen that the computer can be promoted as an educational tool for kids.”

Looking at the story now, with 30 years of computing life behind me and two teens in high school, I see the even deeper message: Technology is indeed a valuable educational tool, as long as it isn’t so intrusive that it replaces all other ways of learning, all other types of interactions, all other activities.

Parents, educators and kids, this is a wonderful show to spark thought and discussion on this very important topic!

Kudos to **Solo Opera** for being courageous and cutting-edge in bringing this very timely and *relevant* opera to millennial audiences, with updated technological references and a fine cast of singers!

~ *Elisabeth T. Eliassen is a Bay Area singer (mezzo-soprano), writer (ASCAP), and parent. She can be contacted at [qoeelis@gmail.com](mailto:qoeelis@gmail.com).*

### **The Computer Kid's Magic Night**

by Joann E. Feldman

Friday-March 4, 2016 - 7:30pm

Saturday-March 5, 2016 - 2:00pm

LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA

Tickets on sale now at (925) 943-7469 or online at:

<http://lesherartscenter.showare.com/TheComputerKidsMagicNight>

Seating is Reserved: Tickets \$25-\$35