

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Kate DiCamillo's book comes to life on stage with the Minnesota Opera 01GF44PYMDYDET6328YV38X04W

CATHY WURZER: You may have heard the name Kate DiCamillo. I say that tongue in cheek. Kate is a celebrated author of children's books, and she lives in the twin cities. Some of her books include "Because of Winn-Dixie," "Flora & Ulysses," the "Mercy Watson" series. Well, one of her beloved books has just come out as an opera of all things.

It was scheduled to open just before the pandemic hit, but the Minnesota opera production was scuttled when public events shut down because of COVID. But the opera has opened back up, and Kate DiCamillo sat down with MPR reporter Euan Kerr to talk about the long-awaited production.

[OPERA SINGING]

EUAN KERR: Here we are with, finally, the full staged opera of "Edward Tulane." What do you think? How are you feeling?

KATE DICAMILLO: It's oddly appropriate. It's so much a story of waiting and being powerless because Edward is a rabbit made of china. He's unable to move. He's unable to talk. He has no agency. And so it seems fitting, this long delay. And I think that it makes it even more emotionally resonant at least for me.

EUAN KERR: The story was originally intended for a younger audience. The audience at the premiere is likely to be significantly older than your original audience. And clearly, you must have wrestled with that issue too.

KATE DICAMILLO: I didn't because I just go my, you know, carefree way thinking, this is what I-- it touches on how I feel about books for children, right, which is that books for children are really books for human beings and that so many grown-ups willfully forget what it's like to be a child, particularly when they have children of their own because they don't want to remember just how painfully alive you are when you're a kid and how aware of everything and how magical everything is.

So as to the adults coming to see an opera based on a children's book, I say, may it awaken the child in you. And for the children who are watching an opera with sophisticated music and drop dead gorgeous costumes and scenery, this is what it's like all the time in your head, and I know it. I remember. And so I think it will satisfy and delight both adults and children. That's what I think.

EUAN KERR: When we talked a couple of years ago, you had been kind of at arm's length with the production. There was frankly no need for you to be there.

KATE DICAMILLO: Right? No, I don't know how to make an opera, right? You know, it's the same thing I say about movies. I don't know how to make a movie. So yeah, best to keep me far, far away, right?

EUAN KERR: But have you been over to the Ordway? Have you seen what they're doing?

KATE DICAMILLO: I have gone to the costume shop. This was before everything closed down. And I was just-- it was-- talk about falling into the rabbit hole. And at the last minute I have a friend who's an artist and I said, hey, do you want to come with me and see this? And it was so great to see her reaction to it because she talked about seeing the little match girl on stage when she was really young and how it was a formative experience for her. And she's like, this is going to make that kind of magic for some kid.

And so that is-- that notion is what I have really, really held on to. I have not been able to go to a rehearsal. The schedule hasn't worked for me to do that. But you know, I'll go. And I figure it's great for me to be absolutely present and not knowing exactly what's coming when I'm a member of the audience. So I'll go on Sunday to the matinee.

EUAN KERR: The production is coming out now into a very different world. Will this be a different audience, do you think?

**KATE
DICAMILLO:** I don't know. This is my guess. I don't think that it will be a different audience, but I think it will be an audience-- this sounds kind of audacious-- that feels things even more profoundly because there is something so moving. We all know this about that communal journey that happens in a theater. And we've all been without it. So we need it, and we're aware of what a precious gift it is. And so I think that people will enter into the theater in a different way.

EUAN KERR: I think you and I share a darkness sometimes.

[LAUGHTER]

**KATE
DICAMILLO:** You told me you weren't going to make me laugh.

EUAN KERR: But I have to ask, on that fateful day, when suddenly everything shut down and they said, no, we're postponing this, do you think that was it? Was that the end of the opera? Were you thinking in those terms?

**KATE
DICAMILLO:** I'm like searching back to that innocent me. You know, what I thought was-- it goes to that-- it goes to this notion, which can be good or bad. It itself was an operatic moment, right? I mean, for everything that we read and everything that we know, none of us thought that it would happen that way. And what it did was you realize anything can happen. Anything.

And so, like I said, that goes to the good and to the bad. So it's like all of a sudden anything is possible. And you know, the first thing I thought when I thought about the opera was, all of those costumes, everything that I had seen when I went to the costume shop, everything is just sitting there waiting. But look, here we are. Anything can happen. It's going to happen. So I take heart from that kind of impossible-- the impossible happening because the impossible happened, and it's happening again.

EUAN KERR: When the curtain goes up, the show goes on, what moments are you looking forward to?

**KATE
DICAMILLO:** Well there's one particular-- this is, again, going to the costume shop. There's a scene where the rabbit, who the opera is about, is underwater. And there's this-- it is utterly magical what they have made for that. He is at the bottom of the sea.

And I'm waiting to see that moment, and I'm waiting to turn and look at my friends' faces when that has happening and also to look out in the audience because I think that that kind of encapsulates that kind of-- what we were talking about at the beginning, that waiting. Just utterly, utterly cut off and waiting. And we all know that feeling. And they're going to be able to put it on stage and with music. Yeah, how fabulous is that?

[OPERA SINGING]

**CATHY
WURZER:** That's reporter Euan Kerr talking with twin cities based author Kate DiCamillo. The opera's final production is this weekend. There are still tickets available. Go to MNOpera.org for more information.