

"No body slamming at the opera!"

Last Thursday, I got to sit in on a dress rehearsal of the opera and sketch, along with a group of local comic artists. The event was organized by the [Black Hat Collective](#), a local comic group I helped found in undergrad, and [Tempo](#), an opera group for young professionals that hosts all kinds of cool opera events.

I'd never been to the opera before this event, and I had no idea what to expect - except maybe classiness. I mean, every time you see people going to the opera on TV, it's a black tie and gown affair and everyone chats about fine art and other totally classy stuff during intermission. So I was a little nervous, because I'm more of a matinee movie and \$5 Goodwill skirt kind of girl and the space in my brain once marked Future Site of Art History Minor has since become Fan Fiction Disposal Site #4, with a chain-link fence around the perimeter and wee little brain-gulls circling overhead.

Usually, the classiest I get is fantasizing about fashionable men's headwear with my friend Leen over AIM.

Leen: You are going to wear a top hat and monocle, right?

Me: I wish! If I had a bowler, I'd wear it. I want a bowler. :(

Leen: Ugh, I want you to have a bowler, too.

Me: I would rock a bowler. I have a safari hat and a fedora.

Leen: ...SAFARI OPERA! It must be done. For the good of my soul.

Me: OMG LOL NO I CANNOT

Leen: My sooooooul

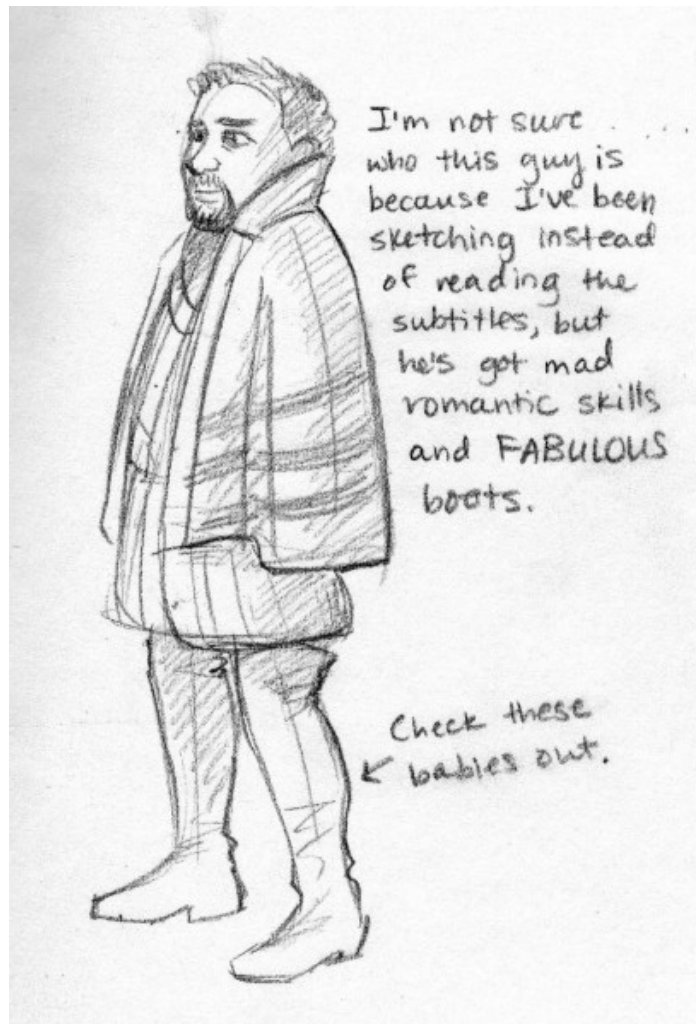
Me: THEY MUST HAVE OPERA BOUNCERS TO KEEP OUT THE KIND OF PEOPLE THAT I AM. AND A SAFARI HAT WOULD ONLY TIP THEM OFF.

Leen: LOL. I want to be an opera bouncer. Ever since 21 seconds ago, it has been my deepest dream.

Me: They'd be all "Excuse me, miss, but you clearly do not belong at the OPERA. Why don't you go to the sandwich shop down the street, where there are cookies for a dollar."

Leen: I would be that person. And then, when the opera was over, I would go get some of those cookies.

Well, I wasn't kicked out of the opera. Even though I drew things like this:



(Pardon my messy sketches. Lesson learned: if I'm going to draw in low light and don't want to smudge my work, pencil might be a bad idea.)

The Tempo group was super friendly and seemed to enjoy having us there, and the show... The show was AMAZING.

We saw Mary Stuart, an Italian opera about Queens Elizabeth and Mary's fight over the throne of England. The show featured gorgeous Elizabethan gowns and a cast that seemed perfectly suited

Theo Nicole Lorenz

writer, artist, coloring book tycoon

<http://nicolelorenz.com>

to their roles. My favorite was Leicester, the guy above, for reasons that I swear aren't *completely* shallow. I mean, the woman he loves is sentenced to death, and he takes it upon himself to save her. He's a great character. (In fabulous boots.)



It's difficult to capture the actors in motion. After furiously sketching anyone who was standing remotely still for the first half-hour, I stopped trying to draw what I was seeing and started drawing my impressions of it, focusing on key elements. Like the way the shadows reflected the mood of a scene--

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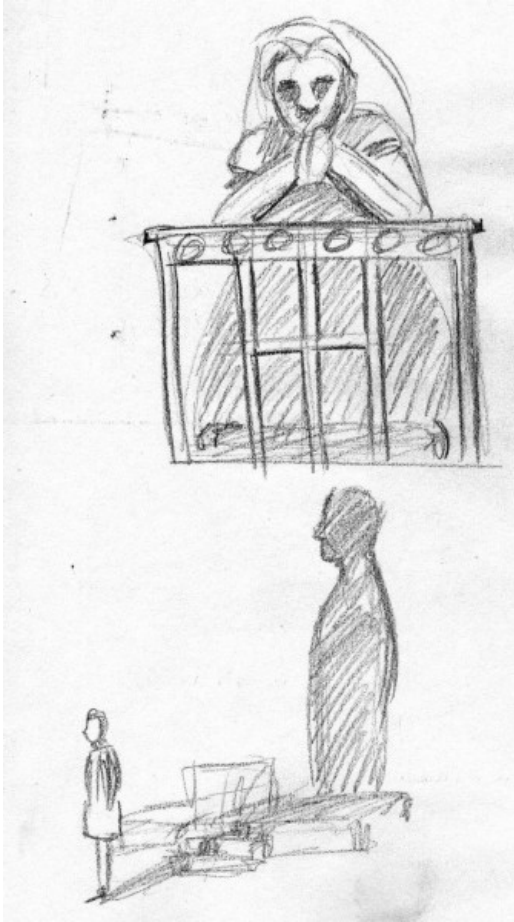
writer, artist, coloring book tycoon
<http://nicolelorenz.com>



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writer, artist, coloring book tycoon

<http://nicolelorenz.com>



Or the significance of a symbolic object--

Theo Nicole Lorenz

writer, artist, coloring book tycoon

<http://nicolelorenz.com>



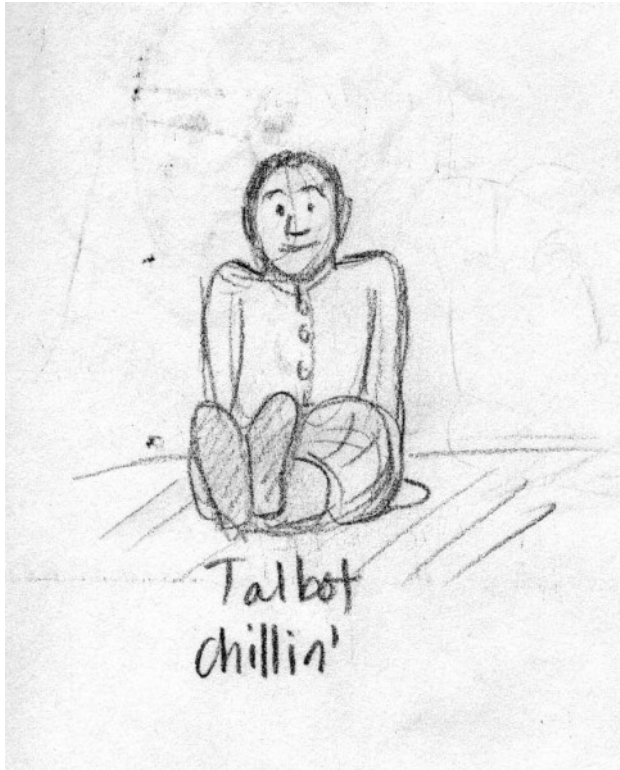
Or the air of importance with which Queen Elizabeth enters a room--



Or the expression on the face of an actor I was too far away to really see.



One of my favorite parts of the event was sitting through the critique period at the end of the rehearsal. While the director gave individual actors notes on their performances, the rest of the cast stayed on the stage, quietly chatting and goofing off together. Members of the chorus did a little boogie. The actors playing Mary Stuart and Talbot dropped to the floor and hung out, looking so relaxed it was hard to believe they'd just been singing about Mary's execution. I got one small sketch out of that part of the night, and I think it's my favorite.



Opera is an art form that radiates history - watching Mary Stuart performed today, it's easy to imagine the same lines being belted out on a stage in Italy in 1835. I went into this event thinking I was going to be completely out of my element, but actually, the opera turned out to be a lot of fun.

And I wasn't even the least classy person there. My friend Abby was sitting next to me, and after the show ended, she whispered, "Body slam!" and threw her weight sideways into my shoulder. I had to say, "No body slamming at the opera!" and then we sort of stared at each other for a minute.

Then she laughed. "You're like, 'Why do we even have this rule?'"

Because even at the opera, we're giant dorks, I guess. But it seems like giant dorks are welcome at the opera, so I'd gladly go again.

Tempo has been posting sketches from the artists at the event [here, on their blog.](#)