

# A Soldier's Torment In Vietnam and at Home

How is this for a story with operatic potential? A prisoner of war held for nearly a decade returns home to find that his wife has moved on, his nation has

**ALLAN KOZINN**

**MUSIC REVIEW**

changed beyond recognition, and he is unable to find his bearings in the society he fought to defend. It is Monteverdi's "Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria" in reverse: the story of the returning warrior, but in this thoroughly modern version, everything has gone wrong, and redemption is out of reach.

It is also the true story of Col. Floyd James Thompson, America's longest-held prisoner of war, captured in 1964 and released in 1973. His wife, Alyce, pregnant with their fourth child when Colonel Thompson went to Vietnam, began a new life after a few years and sought to have her husband declared legally dead. Tom Philpott chronicled the Thompsons' tribulations in the book "Glory Denied," and when the composer Tom Cipullo read an article about Col. Thompson and the book in The New York Times, he knew he had found the subject (and title) of his first opera.

As composers of contemporary opera go, Mr. Cipullo has been lucky with "Glory Denied." Excerpts were performed in New York City Opera's VOX series in 2004, and the work has

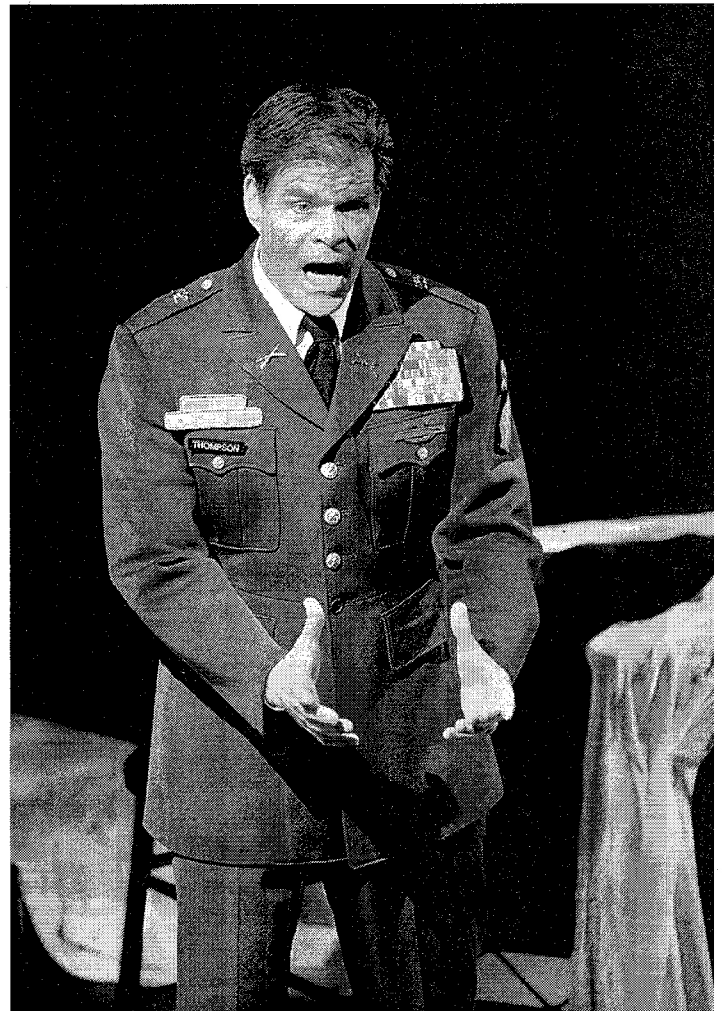
*The Chelsea Opera production of Tom Cipullo's "Glory Denied" runs through Sunday at St. Peter's Church, 346 West 20th Street, Chelsea; (866) 811-4111; [ovationtix.com](http://ovationtix.com).*

## An opera tells the story of America's longest-held P.O.W.

been staged nearly every season since. Now the enterprising Chelsea Opera has taken it up in a spare, affecting production by Lynne Hayden-Findlay that opened on Thursday evening — Veterans Day — at St. Peter's Church in Chelsea.

One of the work's immediate attractions is the efficiency of its structure. Instead of presenting the Thompsons' wrenching history as a straight narrative, Mr. Cipullo tells it as a dialogue between past and present, with actions and their implications shown almost simultaneously. We hear from only two characters, Thompson and Alyce. But Mr. Cipullo has split the roles among four singers: Younger Thompson (Brandon Snook) and Younger Alyce (Kate Oberjat) represent the couple during Colonel Thompson's captivity; Older Thompson (Gary Ramsey) and Older Alyce (Darla Diltz) are the couple after 1973.

The older and younger couples interact throughout the score, which is more of an ensemble piece — a succession of duets, trios and quartets — than most operas. Yet the occasional solo turns were the showstoppers, with Older Thompson's frustrated (and mildly comic) listing of the changes in American culture that he confronted in 1973 as the clear centerpiece. Mr. Ramsey



BRIAN HARKIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Glory Denied** Gary Ramsey in Tom Cipullo's opera at St. Peter's Church.

rendered it, and the role as a whole, with all the power they demand, and a solid, clear sound.

Ms. Diltz, also a commanding presence, brought a firm, focused tone and emotional depth to the bitter, conflicted arias Mr. Cipullo gave her. Younger Alyce has more innocent, languid music, which Ms. Oberjat sang with velvety smoothness. And Mr. Snook's vocal freshness, tem-

pered with despondency, fully captured Younger Thompson's anguish.

Mr. Cipullo's vocal writing is angular and declamatory at times, but he has a keen sense of when to let that modernist approach melt into glowing melody, and he has an even keener ear for orchestral color. Carmine Aufiero conducted a brisk, driven performance.

## For Dinner Tonight: Los Angeles

It's pretty clear that most of the thought, time and money spent in "Skyline" went into the fabrication of the alien creatures who descend in Los Angeles and start feeding on humans at a pace reminiscent of the afternoon rush at In-

**MIKE HAIR**

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★★★★★

POPEYE EBBETT, *THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*

- UNFORGETTABLE

BETH SHARPER, *THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*

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