

Director's Note

Igor Stravinsky's opera *The Rake's Progress* is based on the story of the fictional Tom Rakewell, a character depicted in 1733 in a series of eight paintings by William Hogarth. They portray Tom inheriting a fortune and then following a path to vice and destruction. Artistically the opera is an example of Neoclassicism, a 20th-century movement in which composers sought to return to the aesthetics of "classicism." Our staging takes a similar approach by using modern aesthetics alongside the opera's original baroque setting. The story unfolds in a fantasy world that could visually be described as "Rococo-Punk." In addition, the idea of a "clockwork universe" was very popular among deists during the Enlightenment. It depicts our world as a great machine, running without the influence of God, functioning through giant gears in which time and space are blurred. In Tom Rakewell's nightmare, he journeys around on a revolving disk, which is propelled by the mysterious Nick Shadow. He is moving through the dream, the wheel of karma, in the hopes that he will awaken.

In the finale, the singers address the audience with the following: "For idle hands, And hearts and minds, The Devil finds, A work to do, A work, dear Sir, fair Madam for you—and you." This could simply be interpreted in a moral sense or it can point to something deeper. In the final scene the Rake says: "In a foolish dream in a gloomy labyrinth I hunted shadows, disdaining thy true love." He experiences the world as a series of dream-like episodes in which he does not seem to have any influence. The themes of sleep and madness are recurring throughout the opera and are perhaps metaphors for spiritual unconsciousness. Can we wake up and become conscious? This piece suggests that until we awaken from the dream, we are destined to journey through the same "progress."

Joachim Schamberger