



Photo by S. Malm



Photo by M. Jalhed

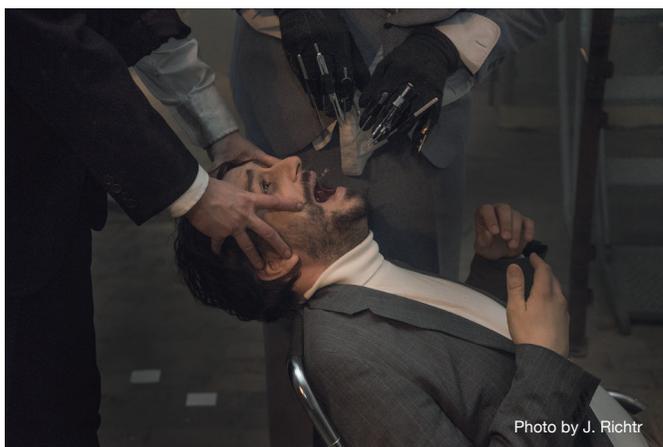


Photo by J. Richt

# DEN TILLTALADE

(English title: *The Architect*)

As the first production in connection to my research project in ludo-immersive opera, *Den tilltalade* (English title: *The Architect*) was created and performed by the Swedish ensemble Operation Opera in the spring 2017. *Den tilltalade* was openly presented to the public, where I had the opportunity to gather observations and try conceptual ideas. My aim was to explore how artists and visitors handled the situation when they were participating in an unsettled operatic subgenre. The format was experimental and might be described as a hybrid opera, where music and drama blend with role-playing. It became a multiple-ended larp opera (with inspiration from live action role-play), set in an urbex venue in Halmstad, where the visitors' abilities and willingness to actively explore and act in the play and inside the fourth wall were decisive.

It was performed three times by a chamber ensemble consisting of four opera singers, one actor, one guitarist, and one live-electronic musician. In addition to the documentation of the performances, I collected the reflections and experiences of both the artists and the visitors via surveys, interviews, informal talks and discussions during rehearsals and preparations, and correspondence.

The storyline consisted of the one and a half hour long surrealistic trial. *Den tilltalade* presupposed the same kernel characters as in earlier operas in the so called *Anfasia Chronicle*, which is set in the fictional, dystopic country Anfasia. All visitors were addressed as Anfasian citizens. A certain responsibility of exploring, trying and witnessing were placed on the visitors. They functioned as a jury with 'obligation to observe silence', unless no one took on the role as 'whistle blower'. The course of events in *Den tilltalade* could only be changed by the visitors' actions, which worked as cues to the artists to which 'track' among the forked paths to take.

Applying participatory action research on the production, I evaluated the performances directly. As *Den tilltalade* was performed three times, we had the opportunity to adjust the

'difficulty level' of 'the game' for each occasion, iteratively evaluating the interaction. Both alternative endings were displayed during the performance period.

There was some confusion about how much freedom the visitor characters had in relation to the kernel characters, and how much freedom the visitors had as players to improvise in the play. Just a few attempts to improvise outside the given framework occurred.

During the preparations before the performances, there was a discussion in the ensemble of how much visitor freedom we could practically facilitate without risking a loss of quality in our personal musical and dramatic performances. As trained stage artists and musicians, we obviously value and prioritize our own effort and profession very high, even though less focus on the musical and dramatic achievements could offer more meaningful play in some cases. Actually, our constraints to uphold the artistic quality might have jeopardized the visitors' freedom in the fictional space.

My reflections from this larp opera probes on social expectations and relations. Also, interactional aspects of the setting and the music (form and style) were evident. This production has made it clear that some visitors can be sensitive to other visitors' behaviour and appearances. The visitors could be divided into either *voyeurs* or *players*. Even though the voyeurs were included in the game as silent, still and obedient characters, they sometimes revealed attitudes that resisted game playing. These approaches may tell as much about the possibilities and problems in ludo-immersive opera as they tell about the conventions and the etiquette in opera in general. Discomfort arose as the participants were challenged in their off-key approaches as fictional characters respectively factual opera consumers, placed in fictional space.

**Hedvig Jalhed**

PhD Candidate in Performance in Theatre and Music Drama  
Opera Singer, Concept Designer and Process Leader

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | CREATORS AND ARTISTS | FUNDING

Libretto by **John Kinell** Music by **Mattias Petersson** Stage directions by **David Hornwall** Concept design and coordination by **Hedvig Jalhed** Set design by **Mattias Rylander** Light design by **Kristofer Langerbeck** Performed by **Agnes Wästfelt, Hedvig Jalhed, John Kinell, David Hornwall, Rickard Stierna, Mattias Petersson** and **Pascal Jardry** The production was carried out by **Operation Opera** in cooperation with **KROCK** with support from **The Swedish Art Council, Kultur i Halland, Kulturförvaltningen i Halmstad** and **Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse**