

Early exits **Opera singers lose the plot**



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For dedicated opera-goers, the complex storylines and rewarding finales can be just as exciting as the music. But that's audience-side: Chris Gillett considers the fate of opera singers whose early exits mean they risk losing the plot... literally.



Here's a strange thing. Despite having sung in over 60 performances of Robert Carsen's production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are whole chunks of it in which I have no idea what's going on. No, not the scenes I'm in (as Flute) – give me some credit, despite being a tenor and all that that implies.

No, there are scenes that I've simply never seen. The beginning of Act 3 for instance; I've always been pre-set behind the scenery with no view of the stage. I can hear what's going on, but when I hear the audience laugh I don't really know why.

Bottom's dream monologue? Never seen it – and as well as the Carsen production, I've done six others. Isn't that appalling? Especially when, with so many performances of it under my belt, some people might mistake me for an expert on the piece. Students, for instance.

This made me wonder how many other singers must be in the same boat. How many Don Giovannis have ever seen the duet between Donna Anna and Don Ottavio? I bet they've always been back in their dressing room popping on a new costume and tidying up their make-up.

A chorus singer confessed that he didn't know how operas he has sung in actually end

And what about chorus singers? I was told the other day about a professional chorister who confessed he didn't know how half of the operas he has sung in actually end. There are vast swathes of the repertoire where the chorus disappears before the last act: *La traviata*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Otello* to name but a few.

By the time Violetta is wheezing her last breath your average chorister is long out of the stage door and half-way home on a train. For all he or she knows, back in the opera house the heroine has had a few spoonfuls of Benylin and is feeling as right as rain, the Almaviva household is being split asunder with divorce, and Otello and Desdemona are settling down for a good night's sleep with a lovely cup of cocoa.

Come to think of it, I rather like those endings.

Read more of [Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs).

The tenor's own blog is [christophergillett.co.uk. \(http://christophergillett.co.uk/\)](http://christophergillett.co.uk)

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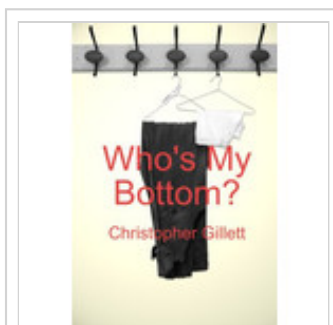
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