



Margaret Garner: The Premiere Performances of Toni Morrison's Libretto

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In January 1856, Margaret Garner—an enslaved woman on a Richwood Station, Kentucky, plantation—ran with members of her family to the free state of Ohio. As slave catchers attempted to capture the fugitives in Cincinnati, Garner cut the throat of her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter to prevent her return to slavery. Toni Morrison first imaginatively treated Margaret Garner's infanticide in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved* (1987). In 2004, it became the subject of her libretto *Margaret Garner: Opera in Two Acts*, a lyrical text designed to be paired with music and sung operatically. Grammy Award-winning composer Richard Danielpour had tapped Morrison to write the libretto for his opera *Margaret Garner: A New American Opera*, which world premiered in Detroit in 2005.

La Vinia Delois Jennings's edited volume records key events, debates, and critical assessments of Morrison's success with Garner's story as a libretto. It also includes essays by individuals who played central roles in bringing the opera to the stage and recovering Garner's story. The collection opens with a foreword by mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, for whom Danielpour composed the title role. The other contributors range from literary and opera scholars to specialists in American slavery studies and scholars of Toni Morrison's oeuvre. Their essays position her libretto within the African American operatic and libretto tradition, a tradition not fully known to performance scholars and heretofore unexamined.



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