

# VIVA'S HOLIDAY

An opera in one act

Music by Christopher Andrew Corbell

Libretto by C. A. Corbell and Liv Elise Osthus, based on

*Magic Gardens: the memoirs of Viva Las Vegas*

## LIBRETTO

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**Cult of Orpheus**

PORTLAND, OREGON

PERSONAE

<b>Viva (soprano)</b>	<i>A stripper living in Portland, Oregon.</i>
<b>Dad (bass)</b>	<i>Viva's father, a minister.</i>
<b>Mom (mezzo-soprano, or contralto)</b>	<i>Viva's mother, a teacher.</i>
<b>Brother (tenor, or high baritone)</b>	<i>Viva's brother, a soldier.</i>

*The action takes place in Duluth, Minnesota during the holidays. The setting is Viva's family home. The scenes take place in two rooms - a family area with holiday decorations and a fireplace, and Viva's bedroom. The action occurs in one room at a time. The living/dining area includes a front door (exit) and a doorway or hall to the rest of the house, including Viva's room.*

SYNOPSIS

**Scene 1**

Dad lights a fire in the fireplace as Viva arrives for her holiday visit. The family gathers and discusses Viva's trip. Viva's brother brings up her work teasingly; Dad thinks Viva is working as a cocktail waitress. Viva and Mom both deflect the conversation to talk about the weather. Dad, Mom and Viva sing a warm family trio, ended by Brother saying "Come on sis, we have a lot to talk about."

**Scene 2.**

Brother questions Viva about her line of work. She defends it, sometimes playfully, and finally with a three-part aria in which she questions puritanical assumptions, praises the sensual experience of dancing, affirms the value of the women she works with. She claims it's her art, her calling and her life to do with as she pleases.

**Scene 3**

Dad questions Mom about Viva's work. She assures him that Viva will undoubtedly outgrow her "flirtation with the service industry." Dad replies that he isn't concerned about that so much, and cites his work in the prisons as leaving him open to all walks of life. He concludes with an aria expressing misgivings about his daughter living so far away, hoping she will find her path.

**Scene 4**

Mom comes to call Viva to dinner, and Viva takes the opportunity to show Mom some of her stripper clothes, thinking she will be pleased with how "girly" they are. Mom becomes increasingly uncomfortable, telling Viva she should not have brought those clothes and showing an aversion to hearing about the details of her work. Tension increases between them; Mom leaves abruptly. Viva considers what has transpired — particularly Mom's question "What if your father found out?" She longs to be able to communicate openly the life she has embraced. Growing bolder in her aria, Viva decides to out herself. She puts on her stripper clothes and makeup, and goes to meet the family.

**Scene 5**

Dad asks "What is this?" at Viva's appearance, and she explains this is what she wears at work, where her

stage name is Viva Las Vegas. Dad angrily condemns her for leading men astray and inspiring lust for money, and as his rage grows he yells “You are a whore!” and says she has no place in his house until she confesses the error of her ways. Mom chides her as well, and Viva retreats to her room. Dad continues to fume, and Brother convinces him to take a walk and cool down.

**Scene 6**

Viva is weeping and distraught in her room, wrapped in her coat. She gathers all her things back into her duffel bag and puts on her boots, and makes her way back to the family room to leave the house. Before the fire and amid holiday decorations Viva sings a final aria, asking “What is home?”, realizing that her home is now in Portland, “in a Chinatown dive,” and ends by affirming her new identity.

**Scene 1**

*Family room*

**Dad**

Now, to light a fire.  
Let it be warm here  
and let's see it glow  
to make this old house  
feel more like home.

*(Noticing a sign of Viva's arrival)*

**Dad**

She's here!

**Mom**

*(entering)*  
What?

**Dad**

She's here.

*(enter Viva)*

**Dad**

Hi, sweetheart.

**Mom**

Hooray! You're here.

**Viva**

Oh I'm so glad to be finally  
back home!

**Mother**

Yes, such a long trip!  
How was the train ride?

**Viva**

It was long, but interesting.  
I had a lot of time to write  
and watch the states drift by,  
snowy mile by snowy mile.

*(enter Brother)*

**Brother**

Hi, sis.

**Viva**

Brother!

**Dad, Mom**

Look, we're all here.

**Viva**

Look, it's the holidays and we're all here!

**Brother**

Look, everybody look here!

**Dad, Mom, Viva, Brother**

Look, it's the holidays and we're all here!

**Brother**

So, how's work?

**Dad**

Yes, cocktail waitressing — how's that working out?

**Viva**

Oh, it pays the bills.

Did it just snow this morning?  
I'd almost forgotten  
what a real December feels like,  
but the bracing cold  
felt so familiar  
when I stepped off of the train.

**Brother**

I wonder what it is  
that makes it snow so here in Duluth  
and "makes it rain" out in Portland.

**Mom**

*(anxiously)*

Did it snow this morning? Or last night dear?

**Dad**

Well it must have been last night.

What are we talking about?

**Mom**

Oh but it probably was this morning  
or the snow plow  
surely would have cleared more.

**Dad**

If you say so!

Son, help your sister.

**Mom**

Dinner won't be long.

**Dad**

And let me say before we reconvene:

This is the greatest blessing of the year,  
to have the fellowship of family  
to make this old house feel like home again.

**Mom**

I'm so glad you are here dear, safe and sound.

**Viva**

I've so looked forward to this holiday,  
and the snow, and you guys, and my room...

**Brother**

Come on, sis.

We've a lot to talk about.

*(Exit Brother and Viva)*

Interlude 1

Scene 2

*Viva's room*

*(Brother carries in Viva's duffel bag, she takes off her coat.)*

**Brother**

So, it's waitressing that pays the bills then?

**Viva**

You seem to know what's up. You have concerns?

**Brother**

Mom let it slip. Exotic dancer!

**Viva**

Stripper is the title I prefer.

Oh for shit's sake brother,  
don't tell me you've never hit a titty bar  
when you're off duty.

**Brother**

Not with my sister working there!

**Viva**

We're all somebody's sister,  
or mother,  
or daughter...  
or simply somebody.

I love my work.

**Brother**

How can that be?  
It seems so demeaning demeaning!

**Viva**

Ha! My most demeaning job  
involved being fully clothed  
and vacant in mind and soul -  
my stage name there was "Data Entry Specialist."

**Brother**

It really doesn't make sense to me  
to try and make a living that way...

What happens when you're on your period!?

**Viva**

When a stripper  
is on her period

she takes a little doo-dad  
called a tampon  
and with scissors  
snips the string off  
and she shoves it  
where the sun don't shine  
and gets her ass to work.

**Brother**

I'm so glad that I asked.

This could lead to something worse.

**Viva**

Like a career in advertising?

**Brother**

There must be sleazy men with drugs there.

**Viva**

Are you referring to attorneys?

**Brother**

It can't be safe.

**Viva**

...said the soldier to his sister.

Listen:

**[Aria]**

*(lively)*

I don't expect you to rush out  
and subject yourself to Michel Foucault  
(though a little on your reading list  
might not hurt) —

Sex is part of what we're all about.

Yes the mind's got thought  
but sweat's got salt  
and the chair's got legs  
and the farm's got dirt.

People having sex: why yes, that's sexual.

Porn on the screen,  
porn in a magazine,

porn on a pole,  
oh yes, dear brother, that's sexual.

And these received discursive conventions  
of shaming and blaming us all for our sex  
foster ever-intensifying  
focus on myriad aspects of sex  
and are therefore themselves also...  
*(sensually)*  
sexual.

The first time I stepped into the Magic  
there was this curve of a back  
reflected in the glass,  
reflected in the glass,  
and it snaked down to the floor,  
a creamy belly,  
a throat's arabesque,  
lips parted in pleasure

and I thought that my heart would break  
and the world would be saved entire.

There was this curve of a back  
reflected in the glass,  
reflected in the glass...

*(more powerfully)*  
The women where I work  
are beautiful and strong.  
They work their asses off.

They're in control,  
they're self-made women,  
they're artists, activists,  
women with power,  
making forty dollars an hour.

I'm a stripper, not a victim,  
a performing feminist  
who knows that money is power,  
making forty dollars an hour.

Stripping is not for everyone.  
Being a soldier is not for everyone.

Becoming an accountant,  
an athlete,  
a lawyer,



an opera singer  
is not for everyone —

when it's your calling you know!

It's my calling,  
it's my art,  
and it's my fucking life.

It's my fucking life.

### Scene 3

*Family room*

#### **Dad**

It may be nothing, but I feel  
that our daughter was a little bit evasive  
when I asked about her job.  
You two have talked at length —  
do you know anything  
about the place where she works?

#### **Mom**

*(Tersely)*

I don't.  
I mean, I know  
she's a waitress  
and it's steady work,  
and that's all  
that I know.

#### **Dad**

I suppose she's grown up  
and can look after herself.

And yet sometimes  
a parent's instincts can't be denied.  
I worry about what she's making of her life.

#### **Mom**

Well she's probably  
just in a phase.  
I'm certain that she will outgrow  
this little flirtation  
with the service industry.

#### **Dad**

I don't really care  
what she does for work,  
as long as she's happy.

You know,  
ministering in the prisons,  
I see grace touch  
all walks of life.

And yet...

**Mom**

Yes...?

**Dad**

**[Aria]**

One thinks of one's child  
in a city faraway  
and one comforts oneself  
with an image of her smile  
and a sense of her spark.

We hope we've given enough  
but lurking  
at our little hope's edges  
are the world's eyes,  
dark predatory eyes,  
in those streets  
we never walk down,  
leering hungrily.

Our doubts are there,  
indolently groping  
for certainty  
that she will prevail  
and find her way.

I think of my child  
and I hope  
her light will shine.

## Interlude 2

### Scene 4

*Viva's room*

**Mom**

Dinner's almost ready.

**Viva**

Oh Mom, I want to show you these things!

*(Viva takes some clothes from her duffel bag, holds up a camisole)*

Isn't it sweet! and look at these...

*(She displays sparkly burgundy 7-inch heels)*

my ruby slippers!

"There's no place like home,"

hahaha.

**Mom**

Oh gosh! Really.

I can't believe you're doing this.

**Viva**

They're so much fun!

Remember how much we used to fight  
because I refused to dress up like a girl?

*(Bringing out more items)*

The fuzzy sweater is fun

when I feel like being coy.

The mirror ball dress will dazzle  
the less reflective boy.

**Mom**

Oh gosh, really, I don't want to see that!

Really, with your education!

**Viva**

You truly would love  
the theater of it.

If only you could see Miss Mona,  
dressed up for a night out  
in her peacock-green brocade  
or skin-tight red cheongsam —

**Mom**

Well I'm sure

that you girls have your fun.

I don't need to know the details.

**Viva**

...or the cabarets! Her legions  
in sequins and feathers!

**Mom**

I don't need to know the details!

Dinner is ready.

**Viva**

*(disappointed)*

I thought you'd like these things.  
We've talked about my work before.

**Mom**

You should not have brought those clothes  
into this house.

**Viva**

Why not?

**Mom**

What if your father found out?

**Viva**

I love dancing,  
I brought these to show you.

**Mom**

What will we put  
in the Christmas letter now?

**Viva**

Oh wow!

**Mom**

Oh honestly. I've got to finish the dishes.

*(Exit Mom.)*

*(Viva broods over what has transpired.)*

**Viva**

[Aria]

"What if your father found out?"  
What if...

Father, why should I fear you?  
Haven't we been open before?  
Haven't we had conversations?

I love to recall  
that apocryphal gospel  
we discussed:

"If you do not  
bring forth  
that which is inside you,  
that which is inside you  
will kill you."

"If you do  
bring forth  
that which is inside you,  
that which is inside you  
will be your salvation."

I have begun to bring it forth,  
a little light in a dive,  
a spark in a dark street —  
how it shines!

How can I hide that which is inside me?  
Haven't we had conversations?

### Interlude 3

*Viva contemplates, looking at her things from work, and then makes a decision. She takes off her street clothes and puts on her stripper attire, and a little makeup. Gathering her resolve, she exits her room.*

### Scene 5

*Family room*

*(Mom, Dad, Brother present; enter Viva)*

**Viva**

Father...

**Dad**

What is this?

Put some clothes on,  
for Christ's sake it's Christmas.

**Mom**

Oh gosh!

**Viva**

We need to talk.  
In Portland this is what I wear at work.  
My stage name there is Viva.  
Viva Las Vegas.

**Dad**

No.

**Viva**

This is my job.

**Dad**

No! Do you hear me? No!!!  
Who made you do this?

**Viva**

No one, I chose...

**Dad**

You chose to lead men astray?

**Mom**

You should not have brought those clothes into this house!

**Dad**

You chose to bring yourself shame?

**Viva**

Stop! Can't we talk?

**Dad**

*(becoming enraged)*

No! Not yet!  
Not until you confess  
the error of your ways!

You inspire lust for money.  
For money!  
You are a whore!!

You have no place  
in this house  
anymore!

**Mom**

You should not have brought those clothes into this house.

**Brother**

Dad...

**Dad**

Not until you confess the error of your ways!  
Not until you confess you lead men astray!

**Brother**

...let's take a walk  
and cool down.

**Mom**

Dinner is ruined! Are you happy now?

**Dad**

This must end right now!

*(Viva, distraught, runs from the room.)*

**Dad**

*(Dad initially starts to follow, Brother carefully prevents him).*

What have you done?

What have you done?

That's not my daughter!

What has she done?

This is an outrage!

"This I say then, walk in the Spirit  
and not in the flesh  
and ye shall not fulfill  
the lust of the flesh."

**Brother**

Dad, let's take a walk  
and cool down.

**Dad**

*(His rage subsiding, but still upset)*

Yes, let's go.

This hurts too much.

How could she go so wrong?

What have you done?

*(inwardly)*

What have you done?

*(Exit Dad and Brother)*

## Interlude 4

*Viva is in her room, sobbing fiercely. She has put on her coat. After a bit she pulls on her boots, and begins hastily putting all her things back into her duffel bag. She takes all her things and exits her room.*

## Scene 6

*Family room*

*Viva enters as the interlude music ends. The room is empty, darker, illuminated by holiday decorations and the fireplace, all of which she regards as she moves toward the door.*

**Viva**

**[Aria]**

What is home?

Is home the place  
others give you the name  
they want you to have  
instead of the name  
you've made your own?

Is home the place  
that demands you remain  
a pink peg fit  
for the bored hole  
on the plastic toy car  
in their little game of life?

What is home, if not  
the place one can be naked?

What is home, if not the place  
where you are yourself?

Goodbye, old house.  
This fire has hurt you.  
This fire is not safe for you.

This fire needs its hearth  
in a Chinatown dive  
on a cheaply-lit stage  
in a nicotine haze.

This fire needs the fuel  
of Miss Mona's cabarets  
and shy boys' eyes  
that cannot look away.



This fire is a light  
that cannot be hidden.

This fire's name is Viva.

*(Exit Viva)*

*End.*