



PHOTO OF ANA REYES PROVIDED BY CHRISTOPHER BROWN
"The House in the Pines," the debut novel of Ana Reyes, was recently optioned for television. Reyes set the book in Pittsfield, where she wrote her first story as a child.

Reyes novel set in Pittsfield optioned for TV production

BY JENNIFER HUBERDEAU
The Berkshire Eagle

New York Times best-selling author Ana Reyes' debut novel, "The House in the Pines," has been optioned for television development by Gato Grande, an Amazon MGM Studios.

Set in Pittsfield, the book was an instant bestseller after it was announced as Reese Witherspoon's January 2023 Book Club Pick. The book, which spent over two months on the New York Times' bestseller list and was named one of the top five bestselling fiction titles for the first half of 2023 by Forbes, was released in paperback Tuesday.

"I'm over the moon to share that Gato Grande, an Amazon MGM Studios company in L.A. and Mexico City, has optioned 'The House in the Pines,'" Reyes, a former Pittsfield resident who still has family in the area, wrote on her Instagram profile on Nov. 18, when sharing the news with fans.

In a similar post on LinkedIn, Gato Grande, stated, "We're thrilled to share we are developing 'The House in the Pines' by the incredible Ana Reyes. The novel was a The New York Times Bestseller and a Reese's Book Club pick earlier this year. We are very excited for the journey ahead."

"The House in the Pines" begins with a viral YouTube video of a young woman dropping dead in a diner in Pittsfield. Across the state, Maya views the video and recognizes the man sitting across from the woman — the same man who was standing next to her best friend Aubrey when she dropped dead in a similar manner seven years earlier.

Maya has always been convinced that Frank — a slightly older boy she dated for a few weeks before she left for college — had something to do with Aubrey's death. She returns home to Pittsfield determined to prove that her initial fears were true and that Aubrey isn't his only victim.

But Maya isn't a reliable narrator. Her story is complicated by hazy memories of that fateful summer coupled with withdrawal from Klonopin — originally doled out by a psychiatrist after Aubrey's death and until recently supplied by a friend — which she's used as a sleep aid. Is her paranoia real or the result of her withdrawal? And if she is right, can she stop Frank before he kills again?

Win it

What: Win a copy of "The House in the Pines"

How to enter: Email Features Editor Jennifer Huberdeau at jhuberdeau@berkshireeagle.com and tell us your top 3 books of 2023. Please include The House in the Pines in your subject line. Winner will be chosen at random from those who enter. Entries must be received by noon on Nov. 12.

Read it

"The House in the Pines" by Ana Reyes

Published by Dutton

\$18 (Paperback)

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In a January interview with The Eagle, Reyes, a former Pittsfield resident, said of the choice to set the book here: "I love Pittsfield. I have a really strong emotional connection to it because I grew up spending holidays there at my grandparents' house on Brunswick Street. I just have all these memories of these warm family gatherings with our family. And then, of course, I lived there in fourth and fifth grade, so a lot of the places we go to are places that I had been and had vivid memories of that I could draw on."

"Initially, when I first started writing the book, it was set in Amherst because that's where I ended up going to middle school and high school. But as I was writing it I just kind of felt myself being drawn back to Pittsfield because I feel like there's something very poignant about Pittsfield."

Reyes, who recently moved to Easthampton with her husband, still has family in Pittsfield. Her uncle, Bill Carey, is The Eagle's former business editor. She'll be in conversation with Margot Douaihy, author of the Sister Holiday mysteries, 7 p.m. Dec. 17, at Odyssey Bookshop in South Hadley.

Gato Grande, according to its website, is a bicultural company that "develops premium content that elevates Latino voices for mainstream markets."

"We know authentic stories resonate, and audiences want to be represented in the shows they watch," its website says. "Gato Grande mines unique stories, talent and IP from across cultures with the expertise needed to sell in Latin America and the U.S."

OPERA REVIEW

An ingenious 'Dragon of Wantley'

BY EVAN BERKOWITZ
The Berkshire Eagle

TROY, N.Y. — To whom do we ascribe the genius of "The Dragon of Wantley"?

To composer John Frederick Lampe and librettist Henry Carey, who managed to skewer 400 years of opera while writing before nearly all of it?

To the singers of the Boston Early Music Festival, who imbued their voices with cheek amid expert slapstick and pitch-perfect overacting?

To the company's period orchestra, consummately entertaining from evocative percussion to the thundering climactic glissandos of the harpsichord?

To the dancers, the beating heart of this production, who, far from obtrusive, were integral and raucously enjoyable?

To the designers behind the uproarious costumes that enhanced every bit of delicious characterization, or to stage director Gilbert Blin, who brought all pieces together and arranged them in some truly original forms?

In a hilarious, heartfelt showing at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall on Dec. 2, and streaming online Dec. 9-23, the answer is a full-throated all of the above.

The plot is largely incidental, but follows attempts by Margery and Mauxalinda to persuade the hallowed (and hammered) local knight Moore of Moore Hall to slay a dragon — fighting each other for his attention all the while.

Sopranos Teresa Wakim as Margery and Hannah De Priest as Mauxalinda played their romantic rivalry superbly, channeling it into the greatest of all operatic battles: that between the divas themselves.

De Priest boisterously commanded (and snuffed out) applause when it served her, and laughed stingingly when Margery sold Moore on her virginal mores. She hammed up her two imprisonments — first as Moore puppeteer her with undone corset strings amid a pealing high note, then in chains on suspicion of attempted murder.

Wakim excelled in channeling the preening prima donna, complete with white kerchief. She rolled her hand into the air far too early for a curling coda like a miffed Madeline Kahn, then admonished a played-for-laughs violin solo from concertmaster Robert Mealy. Best of all, she visibly relished in each held note and bout of coloratura.

The pair joined for a back-to-back duet that showcased the sunny, serene sides of their voices. But both could add a chirping anger or a splash of acid when necessary. Other vocal highlights were the patter numbers, largely sung well and accompanied by effervescent direction featuring a chorus line, a tug-of-war and a carriage with parasol wheels straight out of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Bass-baritone John Taylor Ward was red-hot as the dragon. He was silent, save a few roars, until the very end, when, in a ribald ditty, he cajoled, then battled Moore (tuneful, expressive tenor Aaron Sheehan). BEMF reimagined the scene as



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY KATHY WITTMAN VIA BOSTON EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL
Bass-baritone Douglas Williams, center, a Great Barrington resident, at times embodied composer John Frederick Lampe amid his role as Gaffer Gubbins. Sopranos Hannah De Priest, left, as Mauxalinda and Teresa Wakim as Margery turned the characters' romantic rivalry into one between operatic divas.



Bass-baritone John Taylor Ward inhabited his shimmering costume as the titular beast in Boston Early Music Festival's production of "The Dragon of Wantley."

a bullfight, with Sheehan waving a folded British flag as Ward pawed the stage with his talon-like footwear so convincingly one could almost feel the heat off his nostrils.

Sheehan's perpetual thirst was a rich well for comedy, too, from strumming a flagon in time with the baroque guitar to Wakim's skillful repetitions of "kisses and ale!"

Ward inhabited his magnificent costume, a jacket and tail of shimmering golden sequins and wig pulled up into a Jurassic spike fit for Ward's cartoonish physicality. Costumes throughout were fantastic, though make-up was less consistent.

The opera nestled its action between soliloquies from Great Barrington resident Douglas Williams, the bass-baritone who shone in Hudson Hall's recent "Rodelinda" and here sang Gaffer Gubbins.

In a clever framing device, Williams and the cast began

not as English gentry and attendants but as hastily collated concertgivers, sat in a row, sheet music ahead of them. Later, Williams (ostensibly Margery's father) took on a fleeting identity meant to conjure Lampe himself, directing his performers to even more emoting and even greater pauses before their vocal exclamation marks.

Most remarkable of all were the dancers, Sonam Tshedzom Tingkhye and Julian Donahue as a squire/lady-in-waiting duo. They added to every scene and offered three tableaux in between with their own air-boxing, high-kicking plans to slay the dragon — and their own love story that was a refreshing take on the trope of schmaltzy peasant romances.

The moveable feast was at times a tad too rich, with such a three-ring circus occurring onstage that we worried over missing a joke or an action among the singers, dancers, orchestra and

Opera review

What: "The Dragon of Wantley" by John Frederick Lampe, libretto by Henry Carey, stage director Gilbert Blin, musical directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs

Who: Boston Early Music Festival

With: Teresa Wakim, Hannah De Priest, Aaron Sheehan, John Taylor Ward, Douglas Williams, Sonam Tshedzom Tingkhye and Julian Donahue

Where: Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 30 Second St., Troy, N.Y.

Run time: 2 hours, 30 minutes, including one intermission

Streaming: Virtual premiere Dec. 9, then available through Dec. 23

Tickets: \$25 at bemf.org.

Content warning: The opera features some suggestive themes and adult language

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supertitles above.

If one is to quibble, Sheehan was slightly underpowered as Moore, and committed least of the bunch to a British accent. Wakim occasionally lost track of her flourishes, and Donahue's dancing gave into the mawkishness a hair too often. Oh, and the Union Flag design used was about 75 years too new for Lampe's time, no doubt vexing vexillological opera-goers.

You see, then, there was little to quibble about in this excellent, rip-roaring evening of opera. The virtual performances are well worth a watch.

Evan Berkowitz is The Eagle's page one design editor, and also covers opera. Reach him at eberkowitz@berkshireeagle.com.

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