

TRANSGRESS

A Full-Length Chamber Opera in One Act

Music by John Young
Libretto by Alan Olejniczak
Dramaturgy by Amanda Clup

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CHARACTERS

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| DORA RATJEN | <i>Countertenor.</i> An Olympic athlete in the women's high jump, looks nineteen with a lithe body. |
| MRS. RATJEN | <i>Soprano.</i> A <i>hausfrau</i> and mother to Dora. |
| HANS VON TSCHAMMER | <i>Baritone,</i> The Head of the Nazi Sports Commission or <i>Reichssportführer.</i> |
| DR. KARL GEBHARDT | <i>Bass Baritone,</i> Doctor of sports medicine at Hohenlychen and Senior Physician at the 1936 Summer Olympics. |

TIME AND PLACE

1939

Hohenlychen Sports Sanatorium
Lyden, Germany

SETTING

An empty stage with simple set pieces: two wooden chairs. A small table, a cot, and coat rack.

ORCHESTRATION

English Horn, Alto Sax, Bass Clarinet, French Horn, Piano, Viola, Cello

SUMMARY

In 1939, Dora Ratjen, a Nazi Olympic athlete and gold medal winner in the woman's high jump is arrested for impersonating a man. She is detained by party officials and given a medical examination. The results are inconclusive and Dora is anatomically neither male nor female. Dora's mother visits and she learns why she was raised as a girl. Later, The Head of the Nazi Sports Commission tries to convince Dora that she must live her life as a woman or face the threat of prison or internment. Against all, Dora eventually chooses to live her life as a man. This opera is based on a true story.

SCENE ONE

[VON TSCHAMMER enters with DORA trailing. VON TSCHAMMER is dressed in a highly decorated Nazi officer uniform. DORA wears a long skirt with matching jacket, low heels, and a Nazi party pin on her lapel. She clutches a small suitcase. VON TSCHAMMER is filled with polite concern.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Yes, come in.

There you go.

Sit if you like.

[VON TSCHAMMER sits while DORA remains standing.]

Would you like some tea,
or coffee – water?

[DORA shakes her head no.]

I am sorry,
So very sorry,
This has happened to you.

DORA:

When may I go home?

VON TSCHAMMER:

When this matter is settled.
This is just a preliminary proceeding.
You understand?

DORA:

Why am I here?

VON TSCHAMMER:

You're here for your safety.
Charges were filed against you.
As no bail has been set,
We cannot just let you leave,
But no worries.

I've been sent by the party to assist you.
Dora, You're a fine athlete.
You've brought Germany great pride.
The Führer was upset when he heard the news.
This is a disgraceful way to treat a woman.
This will all go well if you cooperate.

[DORA hesitantly sits]

There you go...
We're all here to help.
Could you tell me what happened?

DORA:

Is it not in the police report?

VON TSCHAMMER:

There are always two sides to every story.

DORA:

My truth has already been decided.

VON TSCHAMMER:

I know this must be confusing.

DORA:

People are not often concerned with the truth.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Of course that's not true.

DORA:

The truth.

VON TSCHAMMER:

That is why we are here.
Have you read the report?

[DORA shakes her head no.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Oh, I suppose not.
I know this is difficult for you.
I have an idea.
Let me read the report and you respond to it.
We'll just stick to the facts.

[He scans the report and reads.]

Last Tuesday evening, September twentieth,
The suspect took the overnight express
from Vienna to Cologne.
Around noon on Wednesday the next day,
The train stopped at Magdeburg,
Where Miss Dora Ratjen – you,
Exited the train to stretch your legs.
Is this correct?

[DORA stares off.]

Is this correct?—

[DORA nods her head yes.]

During this brief stop,
Someone reported a man dressed as a woman.
You were visually identified
And approached by Detective Sömmering.
He asked to see your ID.
Is this correct?

[DORA nods her head yes.]

Your ID was from the European Championship,
But it did not state your gender.
You were taken into custody at 12:15 pm.
They attempted a physical examination
But you resisted.

[DORA nods her head yes.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

You were threatened with obstruction,
and when asked,
You admitted freely that you were a man.
Photos were taken,
Preliminary proceedings were initiated.

[No reaction from Dora.]

Is there anything you would like to add?

[DORA shakes her head no.]

VON TSCHAMMER: *(with kindness)*

You must be exhausted from the journey
And this terrible misunderstanding.
For now, you will stay here
With the other athletes.
We've contacted your family
Your mother will be coming.
That'll be nice, won't it?
Hopefully you will sleep well.
We'll talk again tomorrow.
There is nothing to worry about, Dora.
Dora, the Reich takes care of its own.

[END OF SCENE]

[Transition to the next scene. VON TSCHAMMER exits and DORA undresses to her slip. She changes from her traveling clothes to a plain buttoned-up frock. Lighting indicates a passage of time.]

SCENE TWO

[DORA sits looking out pensively. VON TSCHAMMER and GEBHARDT enter.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Good Afternoon, Dora.
Did you sleep well?

[DORA nods her head.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Do you remember Dr. Gebhardt?
He is the Reich Sports Leader,
The Senior Physician at the Olympics.

[DORA stands to shake GEBHARDT's hand.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Dora just won the gold for the Reich
In Vienna last week.

GEBHARDT:

Congratulations.

VON TSCHAMMER:

She cleared the high-jump bar at 1.7 meters.
A new world record!

GEBHARDT:

You make the Fatherland proud.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Dora continues to dominate.

GEBHARDT:

You belong to the Nazi Party?

VON TSCHAMMER:

The Hitlerjugend.
Dora is one of us.

[DORA looks down at her shoes.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Dr. Gebhardt is here to help us.

GEBHARDT:

If you may...

[Dr. Gebhardt points to the chair and DORA sits again.]

GEBHARDT:

I would like to ask you a few questions first.

[GEBHARDT takes a file off the desk and sits. He scans the file. Dora becomes uneasy. VON TSCHAMMER stands at a distance.]

GEBHARDT:

From your birth certificate,
You are nineteen years old
And indeed born female?

DORA:

My parents gave me a girl's name.

GEBHARDT:

You were never told this directly?

DORA:

You mean that I'm female?

GEBHARDT:

Yes.

DORA:

I have only worn girl's clothes,
what else was I to think?

GEBHARDT:

Did you ask anyone?

DORA:

Who was I to ask?

GEBHARDT:

You are evading my questions.
May I remind you
Sexual deviance is a serious charge.

DORA:

I was charged with fraud.

GEBHARDT:

Transvestism is fraud.

The manifestation of sexual deviance.

Both carry a prison sentence.

Remember, I am here to help.

[DORA looks down at her shoes again.]

GEBHARDT:

Have you always thought of yourself as a female?

DORA:

Yes, until I was eleven.

GEBHARDT:

Why then?

DORA:

My classmates were developing breasts.

GEBHARDT:

When you were arrested,
the officer asked you if you were a man,
and you replied, "yes."
Is this correct?

DORA:

Yes.

GEBHARDT:

Are you a man?

DORA:

I don't know.

GEBHARDT:

You just told me you said we're a man.

DORA:

No, I told that to the officer.

GEBHARDT:

Why did you say that?

DORA:

I was frightened and confused.

GEBHARDT:

That's understandable.

DORA:

I didn't know what else to say.

GEBHARDT:

You could have told them that you were a woman...

Let us determine if you are, shall we.

I will ask you to remove your clothing.

DORA:

And what if I refuse?

GEBHARDT:

You will be arrested for obstruction.

DORA:

I've already been arrested?

VON TSCHAMMER:

You've been detained.

GEBHARDT:

One way or another,
this examination will happen.

"How" is up to you. (*spoken*)

[With hesitation, DORA stands and unbuttons the front of her dress slowly with embarrassment.]

GEBHARDT:

I'll apologize now.
As this is not a hospital,
There is no examination table.
But when the time comes,
I'll asks you to sit
And recline slightly,
With your legs apart.

[DORA steps out of her slip and stands naked with her back to the audience, but facing GEBHARDT.]

GEBHARDT:

Oh, I see...
I'll ask you to stand instead.

[Out of fascination, VON TSCHAMMER steps forward to look closely at DORA's genitals.]

GEBHARDT: *(To VON TSCHAMMER)*

I will be doing the examination.

[VON TSCHAMMER looks even closer.]

GEBHARDT:

Thank you, Herr Von Tschammer!

VON TSCHAMMER:

Oh yes.

GEBHARDT:

You may take notes if you like.
But please stand over there.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Certainly.

[GEBHARDT hands VON TSCHAMMER the file with a pen.]

GEBHARDT:

Here on this page.

Yes. There.

[VON TSCHAMMER writes throughout the examination. GEBHARDT checks the lymph nodes in her neck and then her underarms. Dora sticks out her tongue and opens her mouth wide. GEBHARDT inspects with his pocket pen as a depressor.]

GEBHARDT:

All normal - very good.

[GEBHARDT starts his visual inspection.]

GEBHARDT: *(clinically)*

Let us begin...

Secondary sexual characteristics are male.

The voice is pitched lower than most women,

The fine build of an athlete.

Small waist and slim hips.

No development of female breasts.

No chest hair,

None on the abdomen.

Sparse pubic hair

Square-ish face and jaw

Presence of an enlarged larynx.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Beg your pardon—

GEBHARDT:

The Adam's apple.

[VON TSCHAMMER nods with understanding.]

GEBHARDT:

Do you shave your face?

DORA:

Twice a week.

GEBHARDT: *(To VON TSCHAMMER)*

Make sure to write that down.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Although “lady beards” are not unusual for some sportswomen.

GEBHARDT: *(dismissively)*

Thank you, Herr Von Tschammer.

If I may?

[GEBHARDT puts on rubber gloves to inspect DORA’s genitals.]

GEBHARDT:

Let’s see then...

Severe pathologic malformation of the genitalia.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Wait! Wait.

That’s a lot to write down.

[He catches up with his notes and then nods to proceed.]

GEBHARDT: *(clinically)*

No external testes present.

There’s the Labia Major,

But fused in the middle,

With no vaginal opening.

An enlarged and elongated clitoris

Or perhaps a small penis.

Urinary opening just below the tip.

Scar tissue runs the underside,

otherwise known as “chordee.”

What happens when you are aroused?

[He points.]

Does this ever become engorged?

DORA:

Yes. Sometimes.

GEBHARDT:

So you are a virgin?

DORA:

Yes.

GEBHARDT:

Are you a homosexual?

DORA:

That depends on the outcome of your examination.

VON TSCHAMMER: *(With growing impatience)*

Excuse me?

But is Dora a man or a woman?

GEBHARDT:

Anatomically, it's difficult to determine.

VON TSCHAMMER:

That's not helpful.

GEBHARDT:

I understand you're looking for a particular outcome,

VON TSCHAMMER:

Could Dora conceive a child?

GEBHARDT:

No.

VON TSCHAMMER:

So then she is female.

GEBHARDT:

I don't follow.

[Dora is ignored. She begins to put her clothes back on.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Not all women can conceive,
This is understandable.
Besides, Dora has no testicles
And therefore is not a man.

GEBHARDT:

You have the strangest ideas about human anatomy.
These anomalies are more common than you think.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Doctor Gebhardt, will you state,
For the record,
That Dora is a female.

GEBHARDT:

Dora's gender is undetermined.

[VON TSCHAMMER takes a deep breath and straightens his jacket.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Thank you for the examination,
For your professional opinion.
We'll take everything into account.
We'll decide what is best for Miss Ratjen,
The German Olympic Committee,
And the Reich.
There is much
Too much at stake.
Heil Hitler!

GEBHARDT:

Heil Hitler.

[TSCHAMMER exits. DR. GEBHARDT looks at Dora with concern and then exists slowly.]

[END OF SCENE]

SCENE THREE

[DORA sits on a chair facing the audience. She wears a cardigan over her frock. MRS. RATJEN enters anxiously and stands silently from behind and takes in her daughter.]

MRS. RATJEN:

Dora?

My darling.

[DORA turns and MRS. RATJEN rushes to embrace her daughter.]

MRS. RATJEN:

Are you alright?

Have they hurt you?

[DORA shakes her head no and pulls away.]

DORA:

Where is daddy?

MRS. RATJEN:

Heinrich was unable to come.

The tavern is busy.

MRS. RATJEN:

He's angry.

Not with you,

As if I'm to blame.

As if I'm to blame.

DORA:

He's angry.

But with who? Who?

I am not to blame.

I am not to blame.

DORA:

I'm not really a woman, am I?

MRS. RATJEN:

Of course, you are, my darling.

You are a woman because I say you are,

Because I raised you as one.

DORA:

I've been examined by the doctor.

I'm not a woman!

MRS. RATJEN:

You're certainly not a man!
I've had four daughters,
And changed enough diapers
To know the difference.

DORA:

My body is neither.

MRS. RATJEN: *(dismissively)*

Oh Dora, You're always so dramatic!
You're EITHER a man or a woman.

DORA:

Or a hermaphrodite.

MRS. RATJEN: *(with a flash of anger)*

That's an ugly word!
An ugly word!
I will not have you believe that.
I don't care what that doctor said.

DORA:

Daddy doesn't know, does he?
You kept this from him too.

MRS. RATJEN:

When you were born,
The midwife thought you were a boy.
But then said you were a girl after all.
Yes. It looked a little *particular*,
But it was easier to say you were a girl.
We had you examined by a doctor.
He told us just to let it be.
We never talked about it again and life went on.

DORA:

So you raised me as a girl?

MRS. RATJEN:

You'll never grow into a functioning man.

DORA:

You could have told me this earlier.
I grew up not knowing.

MRS. RATJEN:

What was there to know?
You were christened a girl.
You went to girl's school,
And now you're a young woman.

DORA:

I am not!
I am not!

MRS. RATJEN:

Of course, be angry with me!
The decision was left to me
Because your father was unable.
Either way Heinrich gets to be correct
And I'm singled out as the awful one.
Don't think this was easy for me, Dora.
I had to be the stronger parent.
I love your father, but he's weak...
I made the best decision,
The best decision,
The best decision I could.

[DORA sits and begins to tear-up. MRS. RATJEN hands DORA a handkerchief out of her purse.]

MRS. RATJEN:

I never meant to be cruel you know.

DORA:

Then why?

MRS. RATJEN:

Out of love,
Out of concern.

Not out of denial.
Out of love.
I knew what I was doing
And prayed for the best.
Out of love.
Parents worry for their child.
Out of love.
We were always frightened for you.
Out of love. Out of love.
We never wanted you to feel different.
Out of love.
Out of love.

DORA:

I've never felt normal.

MRS. RATJEN:

Normal?!
What is normal?
Normal people don't go to the Olympics.
Normal people don't win gold medals.
You will always be different.

DORA:

I'm tired of it.

MRS. RATJEN:

Some of this is your fault, you know.
You act differently
So you are treated differently.
This has nothing to do with your body.
So you're blaming me?!

DORA:

It has everything to do with my body.
I'm not blaming anyone.

DORA:

I was arrested for impersonating a woman!

MRS. RATJEN:

But you're NOT a man!
Besides, you're being detained.

DORA:

I'm here against my will!

MRS. RATJEN:

It's for your safety!

DORA:

More lies!

No more lies!

No more lies!

You have always been difficult, Dora.
Even as a child.

I don't mean to be.

MRS. RATJEN:

I remember when you were six,
You refusing to wear your sister's dresses,
Prideful about hand-me downs.
Of course, Heinrich bought you three new dresses.
You cut them all to ribbons
So you didn't have to wear them.

DORA:

I don't remember that.

MRS. RATJEN:

Remember what you did to your hair?
You cut your hair.
Right to the scalp.
I had to take you to a barber
To cut off all of your hair.

DORA: *(She remembers.)*

Ha!

You had to take me to a barber

DORA:

Daddy was furious.

MRS. RATJEN:

It was the happiest we ever saw you.

MRS. RATJEN:

When you looked like a boy.

DORA:

When I looked like a boy.

DORA:

What will happen to me?

MRS. RATJEN:

I don't know.
Just remember that we love you.
In Erichshof, you're a hero.
Your trophies are in the tavern.
We are all proud of you, Dora.
All we ever wanted was to see our children happy...
Still, it's a small village
And small people talk.
Not everyone is kind.
It's best if we keep this quiet,
Quiet for now.

[DORA puts her head on her mother's shoulder.]

[END OF SCENE]

FIRST MUSICAL INTERLUDE

[Lighting indicates a transition. MRS. RATJEN exits and DORA undresses to her slip and gets into the cot and pulls up the blanket. She now has all the pieces of the puzzle, but how do they all fit together? DORA stares out for a time but eventually closes her eyes and sleeps. Slow blackout.]

SCENE FOUR

[It's now the middle of the night. VON TSCHAMMER throws open the door to DORA's room. Lights are snapped on and DORA is startled awake. VON TSCHAMMER is angry. Perhaps, he's been drinking for courage.]

VON TSCHAMMER: *(curtly*

Get out of bed!

DORA: *(confused)*

What's wrong?

What happened?

What have I done?

What have I done?

VON TSCHAMMER:

Get out of bed!

Get out of bed!

Get up!

VON TSCHAMMER: *(Shouting down on her.)*

You tell me!

[VON TSCHAMMER snatches the blanket off of DORA. She gets out of bed confused and frightened. She puts on her cardigan for modesty.]

DORA:

Wha... Why are you here?

VON TSCHAMMER: *(Shouting down on her.)*

I'm here to help you!

Remember?!

I'm here for your safety!

Remember?!

Tell me Dora!

Do you not love the Fatherland?

DORA:

I want to go home.

VON TSCHAMMER: *(With growing anger)*

Then you don't understand your situation.

Your arrest was in the newspapers.

You've created a scandal.

An international embarrassment

For the German government,

For the Olympic Committee,

For the Führer,

Who is most angry with the doctor's report.

Angry at me!

He wants another examination.

DORA: I.. (spoken)

DORA:

I will not go through with another humiliating...

VON TSCHAMMER:

Yes! You see! You see!

You resist any help.

You make it difficult for me.
Your refusal complicates everything.
You will retract your police statement,
And say you are a woman!

DORA:

I'm not a woman.

VON TSCHAMMER:

All of your medals,
All of your titles,
Your world records,
Your Olympic record will be stripped away!

DORA:

I never earned them as a woman.

VON TSCHAMMER:

You will be a stain on German's sports!
They will say women should not compete.
They will say we coerced male athletes to compete!
I will be removed from the Nazi Sports Commission!
I will lose my status in the party!
Do you understand?
This is all much larger than you!
Do you understand?!
Do you *really* understand?!

[DORA begins to laugh quietly to herself. Von Tschammer is taken back.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

What do you find so amusing?

DORA:

It seems everyone has an interest.
Do I have a say?

[VON TSCHAMMER throws his hands in frustration and sits.]

DORA:

I remember...
I remember when none of this mattered.
When I was a child and no one cared.
I once had a friend, Fritz.
We were inseparable.
We played in the forest,
We hung from the branches.
No shoes in the summer,
No hats in the snow.
We laughed rather than talked.
Words were unimportant.
We were wanderers.
Fearless and Free.
I remember.

But things changed.
We grew up and we grew apart.
Fritz became a young man
And I became...this.
So I hid myself from him,
My only friend.
I became invisible.
Then I had no one,
Then I had no one,
Then I had no one.
I remember.

I've always been the outsider
Until I discovered sports,
When the loneliness became unbearable.
I loved high jumping.
The better I became,
The more I was noticed,
The more I was terrified.
Still, I trained harder.
Women surrounded me,
Yet I've never fit in.
I hate small talk and parties.
I've never liked dancing.

I was teased for being different.
And of course I am, I am.
In some way, I'm relieved
Relieved I've been discovered.
Deep down, I knew what I was doing
When I said I was a man.
I wanted someone to stop me.
I no longer want this life.
I no longer want this life.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Then it appears we ALL committed fraud!

DORA:

We did!

[VON TSCHAMMER'S anger begins to rise]

VON TSCHAMMER:

You will retract your statement
And say you're a woman!
I will not be sent to Dachau for this!

[DORA realizes the weight of her situation.]

DORA: (spoken)

What is Dachau?

VON TSCHAMMER:

Let me explain this,
So you better understand your choices.
You can either be "under arrest"
Where you are returned to Bremen,
Charged and sent to prison.
There will be further litigation, of course.
You will be sued for libel.
Your family will lose their house.
Lose their tavern.
Lose their good name.
Or...

Or you can be “detained.”

DORA: *(spoken with fear)*

What does that mean?

VON TSCHAMMER:

Sometimes when the government “detains” people,
They...they have a way of just disappearing.

[END OF SCENE]

SECOND MUSICAL INTERLUDE

[VON TSCHAMMER exits and DORA is near tears. But what to do? She paces. How did it come to this? She eventually dresses for the next scene.]

SCENE FIVE

[There are two men’s overcoats and a Nazi officer’s cap on the coat rack. A medical bag is at its base. DORA and MRS. RATJEN are seated next to each other. VON TSCHAMMER and GEBHARDT stand before them.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

After much discussion,
We have found a solution.
Doctor Gebhardt has agreed to help us.
He will do corrective surgery,
With your mother’s permission.
This all sounds frightening, Dora.
But know you will be in good hands.
Doctor Gebhardt will explain the procedure.

GEBHARDT:

Castration is not so straightforward.

MRS. RATJEN:

Castration! Castration!
You never said that.

GEBHARDT:

What did you think we were discussing?

MRS. RATJEN:

You were going to make Dora a woman!

GEBHARDT:

This procedure will not make Dora a woman.
It will only help Dora appear less male.

MRS. RATJEN:

But you said you were going to make Dora a woman!

VON TSCHAMMER:

Please consider your word choices, Herr Doctor.
Doctor Gebhardt please explain the procedure.

MRS. RATJEN:

Castration! Castration!
You never said that.
You were going to make Dora a woman!
Woman!
Woman!

VON TSCHAMMER:

Explain the procedure.

Please consider your word choices,
Herr Doctor.
Doctor. Doctor.

MRS. RATJEN:

Make Dora a woman
Make Dora a woman.
Make Dora a woman,
Woman, Woman,
Woman, Woman!

DORA:

But...
I...
Excuse me...
Please
STOP!

MRS. RATJEN: *(awkwardly to the doctor)*

Oh. Okay.
I suppose we are comfortable with that.
Aren't we, Dora?

GEBHARDT: *(to Dora)*

My apologies.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Herr Doctor.

GEBHARDT:

First, I will remove the testicles.

I'm certain I will find them internally,

Once removed,

Dora will appear more feminine.

You should develop breasts.

Your face and body will round-up.

You'll also not shave as much.

I will remove excess tissue.

And reshape a clitoris.

You will not have a functional vagina

And...

Of course, there is a risk of infection.

You'll lose all sexual sensation.

But - in the end,

You should appear more female.

MRS. RATJEN:

You see, Dora.

You will never have to be ashamed,

Never have to be ashamed.

VON TSCHAMMER:

You could also make a greater effort.

Men enjoy women who look pretty.

A little lipstick, a little rouge.

Not too much, of course,

A stylish hairstyle, perhaps?

I'm sure there are other beauty tricks.

DORA:

No.

VON TSCHAMMER:

We must all do our part for the Reich, Dora.

DORA:

No.

MRS. RATJEN:

This is for the best, Dora.

DORA:

I am fine the way I am.

MRS. RATJEN:

Don't be grotesque!

DORA:

I am fine the way I am.

Let me make my own choices about my body!

I will not have the surgery.

I will not wear dresses

Or pretend I'm a woman.

I have always felt like a man

And wish to live as one.

I wish to be called Heinrich,

After my father.

MRS. RATJEN: (*angrily*)

Oh, that will make him proud!

DORA:

That's enough!

MRS. RATJEN: (*almost pleading to the men*)

Dora shouldn't be allowed to wear men's clothing.

She could never use a urinal.

DORA:

Look at me!

I look like a man in a dress!

Of course, I was arrested.

MRS. RATJEN:

This is your own fault!
You never even tried to look pretty.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Your name will be struck from the record books.

DORA:

I no longer want that name.
Yes! After all you've done!
Then so be it.

MRS. RATJEN:

After all we have done for you!
Then you can't come home.
What will people say?

DORA:

A man must live and die by his convictions.

VON TSCHAMMER:

"Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies."

DORA:

Then I no longer wish to live a lie.

MRS. RATJEN:

What will you do as a man, ha?

DORA:

I.. I will join German Labor Front,
Maybe learn a trade,
Enlist in the Army.

VON TSCHAMMER: *(Angry, but resolved to it.)*

There is nothing more I could do.
You have fought us at every turn
You will accept the consequences of your choices.

GEBHARDT:

Would it not be in everyone's interest
If Dora simply disappeared as a man?

VON TSCHAMMER:

That will not be my decision to make.
No matter what is said, Dora,
You will never be one of us.
You will never be a man,
You will never fit in.
You'll always be a freak.
A circus monster in the sideshow.

[VON TSCHAMMER grabs his coat and cap and turns.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

Still, I can only pity you...
You'll be escorted back to Bremen.
You can be their problem now.
Pack your bag, Dora.
You'll be leaving today.
Good day.
Heil Hitler!

GEBHARDT:

Heil Hitler!

[VON TSCHAMMER exits. MRS. RATJEN pulls out a handkerchief and cries quietly.]

GEBHARDT: (TO DORA)

Best of luck...

[They shake hands.]

DORA:

Thank you.

[GEBHARDT reaches for his long overcoat and medical bag. He pauses. He drops the bag and hands DORA his overcoat.]

GEBHARDT:

It's gotten cold again.
You'll need this.

[DORA is taken back by this kindness, slips on his overcoat and buttons it up.]

GEBHARDT:

You wear it well.

DORA:

Thank you, again.

GEBHARDT:

Yes, of course.

[GEBHARDT exits. DORA looks at his mother momentarily. MRS. RATJEN turns away. DORA then looks at the Nazi party armband on her sleeve – she pulls it off. Dora slowly inhales - and then Heinrich exhales. Heinrich steps to the edge of the stage and sings directly to the audience.]

MUSICAL EPILOGUE:

HEINRICH: *(sung as a baritone)*

And so my new life began.

I returned to Bremen that day.

Wishing to avoid a public scandal,

The criminal investigation was dropped.

My father had my birth certificate amended

And I was issued a new ID card.

Dora Ratjen was erased from all records.

All my sports metals were returned.

I waited out the war and ran my family's tavern.

I lived my life quietly.

I lived it on my own terms.

My own terms.

[Lights dim on Heinrich.]

Closing Supertitle:

Heinrich Ratjen died quietly in 2008 at the age of 89.

[Music Concludes]

END OF OPERA

There has always been a third gender. 1.7% of all babies are born with ambiguous genital anatomy, a number comparable to individuals born with red hair. Still, many believe this number is vastly unrepresented. While there are dozens of conditions that cause intersex traits, the character in this play would be diagnosed today with Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome or PAIS. This opera could not have been possible without the help of expertise. Thank you to Dr. Brian Cassidy, MD and Amanda Culp PH.D, A special thanks to Hida Vilorio, an intersex writer, advocate, and author of the book: *Born Both: An Intersex Life* (2017) for critical feedback and helping me shape a play and libretto that is better reflective of an intersex individual.