

TRANSGRESS

A Full-Length Chamber Opera in One Act

Music by John Young
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CHARACTERS

DORA RATJEN	<i>Countertenor (Ab3-F5) & Baritone (B2-D#4)</i> An Olympic athlete in the women's high jump, looks nineteen, with a lithe body.
MRS. RATJEN	<i>Soprano (E4-A5)</i> A <i>hausfrau</i> and mother to Dora.
HANS VON TSCHAMMER	<i>Tenor, (Eb3-A4)</i> The Head of the Nazi Sports Commission or <i>Reichssportführer</i> .
DR. KARL GEBHARDT	<i>Bass Baritone (Ab2-D4)</i> Double cast as the Doctor of Sports Medicine at Hohenlychen and Senior Physician at the 1936 Summer Olympics and Police Officer at the Magdeburg train station.

TIME AND PLACE

1939

Magdeburg Hauptbahnhof

and

Hohenlychen Sports Sanatorium

Lyden, Germany

SETTING

An empty stage with simple set pieces: two wooden chairs. A small table, a cot, and a 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 was arrested for impersonating a man. Dora 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 they learn why they were raised as a girl. Later, The Head of the Nazi Sports Commission tries to convince Dora that she must live their life as a woman or face the threat of prison or internment. Against all odds, Dora eventually chooses to live as a man. This opera is based on a true story.

ORCHESTRAL PRELUDE

[DORA enters upstage with a small suitcase and a lady's handbag into a pool of light. It is early morning in the Magdeburg Central Train Station. DORA puts down the suitcase, slowly arches, and stretches. DORA begins to walk off the long train journey, turns and is startled to find a police officer. There is a brief "silent" discussion and DORA nervously opens the handbag and quickly presents an ID to THE POLICE OFFICER. He inspects it carefully but demands another. DORA does not have another ID and is flustered. THE POLICE OFFICER steps closer and grabs DORA's jaw to inspect for stubble. Dora slaps his hand away. He quickly grabs DORA by the elbow to inspect their face. DORA yanks their arm back and is momentarily released from his grasp. THE POLICE OFFICER grabs DORA's arm painfully and threatens angrily. He asks DORA if they are really a man and they nervously reply, "yes". THE POLICE OFFICER turns DORA around roughly and proceeds to handcuff them. DORA compiles but protests through the sobs. They both exit.]

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 a matching jacket, low heels, and a Nazi party pin on their lapel. DORA still clutches the suitcase and handbag. 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 their head.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

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.

Remember, Dora,
you are chosen.

We serve the Fatherland.
And the German people.

Remember, Dora
The party is here to help
But you must trust,
and follow our authority
You are one of us.
We always take care of our own.

[DORA hesitantly sits]

VON TSCHAMMER:

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:

This is why we are here.
To find the truth.

[Dora's about to cry. VON TSCHAMMER places his hand on DORA's knee and smiles gently as a father would reassure a daughter.]

VON TSCHAMMER:*(with kindness)*

You must be exhausted from your 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.
The Reich takes care of its own.

[END OF SCENE]

[Transition to the next scene. VON TSCHAMMER exits and DORA undresses and changes from 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.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

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

GEBHARDT:

How do you do?

[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?

DORA:

The Hitlerjugend.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Dora is one of us.

[DORA looks down at the floor.]

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:

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 girls' clothes.

What else was I to think?

GEBHARDT:

Did you ask anyone?

DORA:

Who was I to ask?

VON TSCHAMMER:

You are evading his questions.

May I remind you...

sexual deviance is a serious charge.

DORA:

I was charged with fraud.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Transvestism is fraud.

The manifestation of sexual deviance.

Both carry a prison sentence.

Remember, we are here to help.

[DORA looks down again.]

GEBHARDT:

Have you always thought of yourself as 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.

VON TSCHAMMER:

You could have told the officer you are a woman.

GEBHARDT:

Let us determine if you are, shall we?

I will ask you to remove your clothing.

DORA:

And what if I refuse?

VON TSCHAMMER:

You will be arrested for obstruction.

DORA:

I've already been arrested?

VON TSCHAMMER:

You've been detained, fraulein.

One way or another

this examination will happen.

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

[With hesitation, DORA stands and unbuttons the front of their 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 ask you to recline slightly

with your legs apart.

[DORA steps out of the slip and stands naked with their 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. Dora sticks out their tongue and opens their mouth wide. GEBHARDT inspects with his pocket pen as a depressor.]

GEBHARDT / DORA

Ah...

[GEBHARDT checks the lymph nodes in the neck and underarms.]

GEBHARDT:

All normal.

Very good.

Let us begin...

[GEBHARDT starts his visual inspection.]

GEBHARDT: *(clinically)*

Secondary sexual characteristics are male.

The voice is pitched lower than most women.

The fine build of an athlete.

with firm muscle tone

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.
(half mumbled)
Se-vere path-ologic mal-for-ma-tion of the genitalia...Go on.

[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:

Do you masturbate? (or pleasure yourself)

DORA:

Often

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.

Can we speak for a moment? (*spoken*)

[Both men step off to the side and Dora begins to put her clothes back on.]

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.

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 and DR. GEBHARDT exit.]

[END OF SCENE]

SCENE THREE

[DORA sits on a chair facing the audience. 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 their head no and quickly 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.

DORA:

He's angry.

But with who? Who?

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 girls' school,
and now you're a young woman.

DORA:

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 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.

We never wanted you to feel different.

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!

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

More lies!
No more lies!

I don't mean to be.

DORA:

I don't remember that.

MRS. RATJEN:

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

DORA: *(Remembering)*

Ha!

You had to take me to a barber
He cut off all my hair.

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 their head on MRS. RATJEN's shoulder.]

[END OF SCENE]

FIRST ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE

[Lighting indicates a transition. MRS. RATJEN exits and DORA undresses to their slip and gets into the cot and pulls up the blanket. DORA now has all the pieces of the puzzle, but how do they all fit together? DORA stares out for a time but eventually drifts off to sleep. 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: *(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)*

You tell me!

[VON TSCHAMMER snatches the blanket off of DORA. DORA gets out of bed confused and frightened. DORA's put on a cardigan for modesty.]

DORA:

Wha... Why are you here?

VON TSCHAMMER:

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...

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:

This will be a stain on German 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. 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.

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.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Then it appears YOU committed fraud!

DORA:

No! We ALL 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 the 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 ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE

[VON TSCHAMMER exits and DORA is near tears. But what to do? DORA paces. How did it come to this? DORA 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 how will Dora ever become a mother?

A mother!

VON TSCHAMMER:

Please consider your choice of words.

Doctor Gebhardt, please explain the procedure.

GEBHARDT:

The surgery is not straightforward.

MRS. RATJEN:

Castration! Castration!

You never said that.

VON TSCHAMMER:

Explain the procedure.

GEBHARDT:

Straightforward.

What did you think we were discussing?

MRS. RATJEN:

You were going to make Dora a woman!
Woman!
Woman!

VON TSCHAMMER:

Please consider your words,
Herr Doctor.
Doctor. Doctor.
Herr Doctor.
Words! Words, Herr Doctor...

GEBHARDT:

It will only help Dora appear
less male.
Appear less male.
Dora appear less male.
Appear less male.
Dora appear less male.

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:

So here we are! (*spoken in anger*)
It's always mothers who make
the difficult choices for their daughters.
If this is the only solution,
We will do what must be done!

GEBHARDT: (*to MRS RATJEN*)

Our 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 / VON TSCHAMMER:

You will appear more female.

GEBHARDT / VON TSCHAMMER / DORA / MRS. RATJEN: *(as an aside)*

But what does it mean,
To be female?
What does it mean,
to be a woman?
What does it mean,
to look like a woman?

DORA:

But what does it mean...
Who gets to be a woman?

VON TSCHAMMER / GEBHART:

You should appear more female.

MRS. RATJEN:

You see, Dora.
You see.
You will never have to be ashamed.

VON TSCHAMMER:

You can 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 shakes their head no.]

VON TSCHAMMER:

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

DORA:

No.

MRS. RATJEN:

This is for the best, Dora.

DORA:

There's nothing wrong with my body.

MRS. RATJEN:

Don't be absurd!

DORA:

I am not a woman!

I never felt like a woman!

I will not have the surgery.

I will not wear dresses

or pretend anymore to please.

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 can 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:

I will no longer live a lie
just to please others!
This is the truth of it!
I've always been a man,
but not by your definition.
This is who I am; I am a man!
This is who I was meant to be.
Always was meant to be.
This is who I am.
I've always been a man!
I am a man!

MRS. RATJEN:

What will you do as a man, ha?

DORA:

I.. I will join the German Labor Front,
maybe learn a trade,

enlist in the Army.

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

There is nothing more I can 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.
Heil Hitler!

GEBHARDT:

Heil Hitler!

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

GEBHARDT: (TO DORA)

Best of luck to you.

[They shake hands.]

DORA:

Thank you.

[GEBHARDT reaches for his long overcoat and medical bag but 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 MRS. RATJEN who turns away. DORA looks at the Nazi party armband and 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)*

I returned to Bremen that day.

And so my new life began.

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 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 Nicole Paiement, Brian Staufenbeil, 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 for helping me shape a short play and a libretto that better reflects the life of an intersex individual.