

On November 7 and 8, [Chelsea Opera](#) performs two one-act operas by Henry Mollicone, *The Face on the Barroom Floor* and the New York premiere of *Emperor Norton*. Mollicone will conduct and play piano for these performances at St. Peter's Church in Chelsea.



[Henry Mollicone](#) is a distinguished American composer based in San Jose, California, best known for his one-act chamber operas, including *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, *Emperor Norton*, and *Starbird*. He has written three full-length operas (*Coyote Tales*, *Hotel Eden*, and *Gabriel's Daughter*), as well as music for chorus, ballet, film and television and has received commissions for new works from several distinguished organizations, including Central City Opera, San Francisco Opera (and the Herbert Adler Award Foundation), Houston Grand Opera, and Long Beach Symphony.

*We were curious to learn more about Henry Mollicone and his music, so we put the following questions to him:*

**Classical Music Communications:** What do you love about writing opera? What do you find most challenging about the art form?

**Henry Mollicone:** Writing for the voice is what I love the most. Working with a collaborator or librettist is also a great joy, as we composers usually work alone. Most challenging is after a premiere- even a glowing success- getting other companies to consider new productions of the work.

**CMC:** Most of your body of work is vocal music, and you are best known for your one-act operas. What specifically attracts you to the shorter form?

**HM:** Actually I have written three full length pieces, and enjoy working in both short and long forms. The shorter form is attractive as it poses the challenge of condensing the drama into a shorter time period. Also, chamber operas tend to get more productions than the larger works!

**CMC:** You have a unique style that sounds distinctly American. What are your musical influences?

**HM:** I think my biggest influences are Barber, Bernstein, Britten, sometimes vernacular musical elements (musical theater and jazz), and my love for the melodic line. As in most of my works, the musical content is eclectic. *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, for example, often uses music that evokes the feeling of the old West.

**CMC:** What inspired you to create the opera *The Face on the Barroom Floor*?

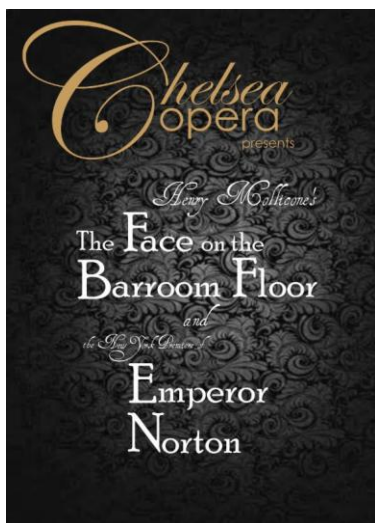
**HM:** It was a commission for a very short opera from Central City Opera, and it had to be on a local subject. Librettist John S. Bowman looked at many possibilities, and something about the *The Face of the Barroom Floor* subject was particularly attractive to us.

**CMC:** Emperor Norton is such a fascinating, and bizarre, historical figure. How did you and your librettist John S. Bowman develop his story into an opera?

**HM:** Now THAT was a challenge! In the research on Norton, we found many interesting incidents in his life, but there was no drama! It was all very frustrating, until John S. Bowman finally came up with the idea about a modern day playwright writing a new play about the character, and having Norton somehow appear from the past to set her straight on what his life was really like. I must say after John came up with this concept, it all came together, and we found a continuous dramatic line.

**CMC:** These two one-act operas stand alone quite well. When performed together what kind of different impression of story do they give?

**HM:** Well, they both deal with fantasy and a supernatural element. That is why I think they go well together. (I have been involved with this pairing of the two operas in the past). On the other hand, they are very different in dramatic and musical content. But both rely largely on melodic vocal lines, as I feel the need (and responsibility) to provide the singers and audience with idiomatic vocal music that communicates. Being a tonal composer, this is something I love doing!



**November 7 (7:30pm) and November 8 (4pm)**  
***The Face on the Barroom Floor* and *Emperor Norton***  
**St. Peter's Church in Chelsea**  
**More information and Tickets: [ChelseaOpera.org](http://ChelseaOpera.org)**