

## Rival US Supreme Court justices battle in court: Now, the opera

Washington (dpa) - Even Americans who only vaguely follow the US Supreme Court are familiar with the famous names: Justice Ruth Bader-Ginsburg, the liberal, and Justice Antonin Scalia, the conservative.

While it's commonly known that these two oppose each other in the extreme in interpreting the US Constitution - most recently on gay marriage and Obamacare, where Ginsburg supported the winning liberal opinion - it's lesser known that these two share a close friendship and love of opera.

What greater fodder for drama than this? That's what American composer Derrick Wang, 31, thought when he was in law school, reading Scalia's dramatic dissents and Bader-Ginsburg's opposite, articulate and soft-spoken opinions.

Wang said he heard music, and the idea was born.

On Saturday, his hour-long opera, *Scalia/Ginsburg*, will debut at a festival in Virginia, just outside the nation's capital.

Wang said that opera and law have often been intertwined dramatically on the stage, but nothing quite like what he has done in *Scalia/Ginsburg*.

"When it was first just an idea, I didn't think I would imagine something like this happening at such a large festival in the [Washington} DC area," Wang told dpa.

"It was very gratifying."

The premiere is sold out, said Castleton Festival co-founder Dietlinde Turban Maazel, a native of Germany and winner of Germany's prestigious 1983 Bambi Award for best actress.

Turban Maazel, the widow of American conductor, violinist and composer Lorin Maazel with whom she founded the festival, told dpa that she is excited to host the world premiere.

"I think it's an absolutely genius idea for an opera," Turban Maazel said.

Wang studied music theory as an undergrad at Harvard, and has his masters in music composition from Yale. The Maryland native then attended law school at the University of Maryland - inspired by his work "behind the scenes" with art organizations.

"What ended up happening was my interest in both music and law combined," Wang said. "It was a matter of bringing these two worlds together."

Together, Ginsburg, 82, and Scalia, 79, have served half a century on the court: Ginsburg 21 years, Scalia 28 years. The two are known to dine together at each other's homes, attend theatre and share family vacation times. They were once photographed riding elephants.

"What's not to like," Scalia once said about Ginsburg at a forum on constitutional issues at George Washington University in February, "besides her views of the law."

Ginsburg said she does not like Scalia's interpretation of law either, but she does like her friend's passion for the constitution.

"He makes me laugh, we were buddies on the DC Circuit [Court]," she said. "And before that, when we were both in the law-teaching business, I attended a talk he was giving and I disagreed with almost everything he said, but I was charmed by the way he said it."

Wang told dpa that when he originally asked for permission, Scalia joked that even if he disapproved, Wang's composition was protected by free speech guarantees of the constitution.

The two justices seem to have enjoyed the opera idea from its inception. In fact, the Supreme Court invited him to perform excerpts at the end of court's 2012-2013 session.

"They enjoyed it, hearing how their words are put to opera," Wang said.

Some of his lyrics are set to the music of the Star-Spangled Banner, public radio reported about the 2013 preview.

A tenor-Scalia questions Ginsburg's interpretation of the constitution:

"Oh Ruth can you read? You're aware of the text. Yet so proudly you failed to derive its true meaning."

Soprano-Ginsburg replies: "You are searching in vain for a bright-line solution, to a problem that isn't so easy to solve. But the beautiful thing about our Constitution is that like our society, it can evolve."

Specific cases are referenced in the opera. One case Wang was considering to add was the 2013 US v Windsor case, when the court declared the Defence of Marriage Act unconstitutional. Ginsburg supported the majority, Scalia dissented.

Ginsburg is a familiar face on Washington's theatre scene - not only attending operas with Scalia, but also sitting in mock judgement of famous operas at the Shakespeare Theatre.

At the 2014 Castleton Festival, Ginsburg made a comedic presentation on how operas would be different if characters had lawyers, while Wang played a few pieces from his draft of Scalia/Ginsburg. That is where Turban Maazel said they stumbled upon the piece.

"We offered him we could do the world premiere here at Castleton," she said.

The festival is producing and casting the performance, and supplying an orchestra for what Wang originally wrote for piano.

"It's a farce in the sense ... of the unlikely friendship between two justices who are so opposed in their opinions, but in real life are such incredibly good friends and the common denominator is their love for opera," Turban Maazel said.

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