

The Last American Hammer

Music by Peter Hilliard
Libretto by Matthew Boreasi

Study Guide to the Opera



20th-century Character Mugs/Toby Mugs in the American Toby Jug Museum, Chicago
<https://www.wheretraveler.com/chicago/american-toby-jug-museum>



Toby Jugs to Novelty Mugs

by Rachel Silverstein

A Toby Jug is a ceramic pitcher invented in the 18th century to resemble the full body of an historical or fictional character. The origin of the jug is unknown but usually attributed to English potters John Astbury or Thomas Wheildon. The Toby Jug became an instant success and found homes as popular pouring vessels in pubs. The name for the jug comes from the character of Sir Toby Belch from Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night*, a character well known for his drunkenness and comedic personality. The “Original Tobies” date back to the 1760s and often depict a large man with a tricorn hat, smoking a pipe. Smaller versions of the ceramic beverage container of a character’s torso are Toby Mugs—for drinking.

By the end of the 19th century, there were official Toby Jug manufacturers in France, Germany, the United States, and beyond. Some fun designs were the Thin Man, Hearty Goodfellow, Sailor, Man on a Barrel, Lord Howe, and Drunken Sal. During the 20th century, the popularity exploded with more than 200 manufacturers in Europe and the United States. New designs of the jug were based on celebrities like Marilyn Monroe and Winston Churchill, as well as storybook characters like Robin Hood. As the popularity of the container has declined, most companies have discontinued making Toby Jugs, but there is still a niche market for fun mugs.

Today it is more likely for a typical shopper to purchase a novelty mug in the image of a Disney or Loony Tunes character than to seek out one of the antique jugs, but the connection between these two items is unmistakable. The inspiration to make everyday items into fun art brings a little extra joy into the day. Who knows, maybe we will be seeing the face of Sir Toby Belch in our bars and pubs again someday. And look for the face of Sir Oswyn in *The Last American Hammer!*

The Last American Hammer

Chamber Opera in one act

2018 Premiere by Urban Arias in Washington, DC

Setting: A small town in Ohio, late evening,
The National Toby Jug Museum

Summary:

Milcom Negley, a conspiracy theorist and militiaman, declares his disappointment in the American Government in a stirring introduction (“**Now I Understand...It is the God’s Honest Truth**”). The story truly begins as Milcom occupies the National Toby Jug Museum in a small town in Ohio. The museum’s curator, Tink Enraught, calls the sheriff and law enforcement sends rookie FBI Agent Dee Dee Reyes. Since the situation is non-threatening, Tink offers Agent Reyes tea and cookies.

Meanwhile Milcom launches into his conspiracy theories (“**Now I Understand...The 13th Amendment**”) and outrage that the Toby Jug Museum is the last place in the area that receives federal funding. Deeply offended, Tink defends her quaint museum and the value of “delicate things,” (“**How many years...the value of Delicate Things**”). Milcom reveals a steel hammer, the last one made at the factory he worked in (“**Such proper examination...The Last American Hammer**”). He also arranges a number of Toby Jugs in a mock courtroom scene, intending to put the U.S. government on trial, as Tink explains to Reyes why she agreed to allow Milcom to use her museum in his protest (“**I am a Terrorist...There Used to be a Sentiment**”).

Milcom acts as the prosecutor and the precious Sir Oswyn jug is the defendant. Tink grows increasingly concerned for the jug’s safety (“**The American Dream**”). Milcom continues his tirades about how the United States they live in is not the one promised by the founders (“**I’ve Worked my whole life**”). He finally stops and requests Agent Reyes to make a closing statement on behalf of the government. She uses this as an opportunity to express her own grievances and Milcom’s injustice by expecting her to represent an entire government (“**Oh, I Heard You, Mr. Negley**”).

In conclusion, Milcom announces that the jury has found the defendant guilty and sentences the jug to destruction (“**The Jury Has Finished Deliberations**”). Milcom swings his hammer at the Sir Oswyn jug while Tink and Reyes watch in horror. Agent Reyes places the hammer back in its case and announces the sheriff will be coming. Reyes thanks Tink for the tea, takes one last cookie, and leaves. Tink sweeps up the shattered remains of the prized jug while Milcom watches, filled with guilt.

Characters

Milcom Negley *baritone*

Conspiracy theorist, self-proclaimed militiaman, and former factory worker. Carries with him the last hammer made in his factory before it shut down.

Tink Enraught *soprano*

An eccentric curator of the Toby Jug Museum. She has known Milcom for years and has allowed him to occupy her museum to make his statement.

Dee Dee Reyes

mezzo-soprano

A rookie FBI field agent sent to the Toby Jug Museum. She is sent in response to a call about someone occupying this government-funded building in protest.



True American Hammers Hand tool companies still manufacturing in the U.S.

- ABC Hammers Inc., Florida
- AMPCO Safety Tools, Texas
- Atlas Weld Cleaning Tools, Michigan
- Douglas Tool, California
- Estwing, Illinois
- Hardcore Hammers, Illinois
- Jackson Professional Tools, Pennsylvania
- Ken-Tool, Ohio
- Klein Tools, Iowa
- NC Black CO LLC, North Carolina
- Snap-on Inc., Wisconsin
- Stiletto Tools, California
- Vaughan Manufacturing, Illinois

Tink Enraught and American Domestic Terrorism

by Rachel Silverstein

Near the end of *The Last American Hammer*, the unassuming Tink admits to being a radical in the 1960s. Today we often think that only large incidents and gun shootings orchestrated by people who hate America are acts of terrorism, but there is more to it than wanting to insight fear in a population.

Under the **2001 USA Patriot Act**, acts of domestic terrorism are defined as activities that:

- (A) Involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the U.S. or of any state**
- (B) Appear to be intended**
 - (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population**
 - (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion**
 - (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping**
- (C) Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.**

Acts of domestic terrorism are charged under specific laws, such as committing a crime against a government agent or causing harm to a government building. This also includes protests that put the protestors or the people they are protesting in danger. A notable example is the Vieques Island protests, where protesting civilians entered a military base to disrupt bomb testing. The forced entry into a military base is illegal but this also put the

The Vieques protests took place from 1999 through 2003 on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, thirteen miles east of the main island. Since the early 1940s, the United States Navy and Marine Corps had maintained a base on Vieques for the testing of bombs and practicing bombing techniques. Locals began to protest activities at the base after the accidental death of a Vieques civilian, David Sanes, on 19 April 1999. The Vieques bombings became a flash point for those who opposed Puerto Rico's status as a commonwealth of the United States.

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protestors and the soldiers conducting the tests in extreme danger, categorizing the act as domestic terrorism.

The character of Tink vaguely describes the kind of protests she took part in. Much like the one on Vieques Island, she acted with little regard for the law and the possibility of putting herself and other protesters in danger. She recounts that one day she returned to her townhouse in Greenwich Village to find it in pieces, probably after a homemade bomb gone wrong. This is why she allows Milcom this opportunity to occupy her museum and make his voice heard, so he can “make his noise” without the repercussions of arrest or an accident. She has given him permission to be there, he is not holding her captive, and the sheriff did send someone to inspect the situation. Milcom is not committing any crime and still has the chance to express his grievances to someone from the U.S. government, which was what he wanted.



Toby Jug, ca. 1780
“Ralph Wood the Younger”
Part of the Metropolitan
Toby Jug collection

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/199335>

Milcom sees himself as this great threat giving demands, but the true mastermind behind this odd situation is Tink. She uses her knowledge about domestic terrorism laws to get Agent Reyes to the museum while keeping the situation non-threatening and offers the agent tea and a chat. Milcom does not become a domestic terrorist until he destroys the Toby Jug, ending the delicate peace talk that Tink has orchestrated. Do you agree?



Matthew Boresi and Peter Hilliard

Meet the Composer and Librettist

by Rachel Silverstein

Composer **Peter Hilliard** (b July 20, 1975) is a Philadelphia-based opera and musical theater composer. His previous works include musical theater pieces *Don Imbroglia* and

Going Down Swingin' as well as his opera *The Filthy Habit*, all of which have libretti by Matt Boresi. Also a conductor, Hilliard conducted the 2016 production of *The Pirates of Penzance* at the International Gilbert and Sullivan festival in Harrogate, England. Hilliard is also the music director of the Abington Choral Club and the Savoy Company and plays jazz piano on occasion with the Bob Wagner Quartet. Hilliard holds degrees in Composition from the San Francisco Conservatory and in Musical Theatre Writing from New York University.

Librettist **Matthew Boresi** (b May 14, 1975) is a Chicago-based opera and musical theater librettist. Boresi has created libretti for the Off-Broadway shows *Don Imbroglia* and *Going Down Swingin'* as well as the opera *The Filthy Habit*, all of which are composed by Peter Hilliard. Boresi is the Director of School and Community Partnerships at the Music Institute of Chicago and is a Visiting Lecturer of Opera and Musical Theater at Carthage College, North Central College, and Northwestern University. Boresi holds degrees in Musical Theatre Writing from New York University and Theatre Performance from North Central College.

Works by Hilliard and Boresi

OPERAS

<i>The Last American Hammer</i>	2018
<i>Blue Viola</i>	2015
<i>The Filthy Habit</i>	2004
<i>The Brazilian</i>	2004
<i>Don Imbroglia</i>	2002, 2005
<i>Wonderful Clockwork</i>	2001

MUSICALS

<i>Rigger Mortis</i>	2011
<i>A Schooling in Love</i>	2009
<i>Going Down Swingin'</i>	2007

Plus Art Songs, Performance Art/Vaudevilles, and Choral Music

For more information: hilliardandboresi.com/works.html

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