

SYNOPSIS: **LSD: Huxley's Last Trip**

a one-act chamber opera in nine scenes (90 minutes)

Music and Libretto by Anne LeBaron

(with libretto contributions from Gerd Stern and Ed Rosenfeld)

Spanning two turbulent decades of discovery and paranoia, *LSD: Huxley's Last Trip* traces the emergence of an unprecedented chemical force as it circulates among scientists, CIA operatives, and a visionary writer and philosopher, culminating in a quiet act of transcendence amid a national tragedy. Featuring Albert Hofmann, Aldous Huxley, and Mary Meyer within a cast of ten singers portraying twenty-four roles, the opera shifts fluidly between historical fact and hallucinatory experience, guided by the recurring presence of the LSD Trio—three sopranos who personify the drug as a seductive, mind-expanding, and ultimately transformative force.

The opera opens on “**Bicycle Day**” in Basel, 1943, where chemist Albert Hofmann accidentally discovers LSD and, in a moment of curiosity, ingests it, launching a fateful bicycle ride that dissolves the boundaries between perception and reality. A decade later, in the Hollywood Hills, Aldous Huxley undergoes a psychedelic initiation in “**The Doors of Perception**,” encountering a heightened awareness of beauty, time, and being that reshapes his philosophical outlook.

Shadowing these personal awakenings, a darker institutional narrative unfolds. At CIA headquarters in “**MK-ULTRA**,” Allen Dulles and Sidney Gottlieb develop covert experiments using LSD as a tool of mind control, leading to the suspicious death of scientist Frank Olson. This moral descent deepens in “**Operation Midnight Climax**,” where surveillance, manipulation, and voyeurism converge in a grotesque theater of untethered human experimentation.

At the same time, the era's most consequential scientific breakthroughs suggest an unexpected path back to LSD. In “**Double Helix**,” Francis Crick and James Watson celebrate their discovery of DNA's structure, as the LSD Trio slithers through the “Helix Dance,” signifying an uncanny resonance between molecular revelation and altered consciousness. The opera's central section, “**Three Lunches**,” links key figures across continents, including Hofmann, Huxley, Timothy Leary, and Marshall McLuhan, charting the rapid cultural diffusion of psychedelic thought.

The narrative turns toward the political sphere in “**Millbrook / Georgetown**” and “**The White House**,” where Mary Meyer—artist, socialite, and ex-wife of CIA official Cord Meyer—emerges as a utopian visionary. Convinced that LSD could foster global peace, she sets out to introduce it to her inner circle and President John F. Kennedy. In a psychologically charged encounter, JFK's hallucinations of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy blur past and present, public and private, desire and fear.

The opera reaches its apex in “**Huxley's Last Trip**,” on November 22, 1963. As news of JFK's assassination reverberates in the background, Aldous Huxley, on his deathbed, requests LSD from his wife Laura. In a final act of compassion, set against the violence and upheaval broadcast over television in an adjacent room, she administers the drug to ease his transition and sings him ‘into the light.’

Scored for chamber ensemble and microtonal instruments designed by Harry Partch, the opera forges a richly textured sonic world that mirrors its central concerns: the expansion and fragmentation of perception, the collision of idealism and control, and the enduring human search for transcendence. Both historical and urgently contemporary, *LSD: Huxley's Last Trip* invites audiences to reconsider a pivotal era whose unresolved tensions continue to shape our world.