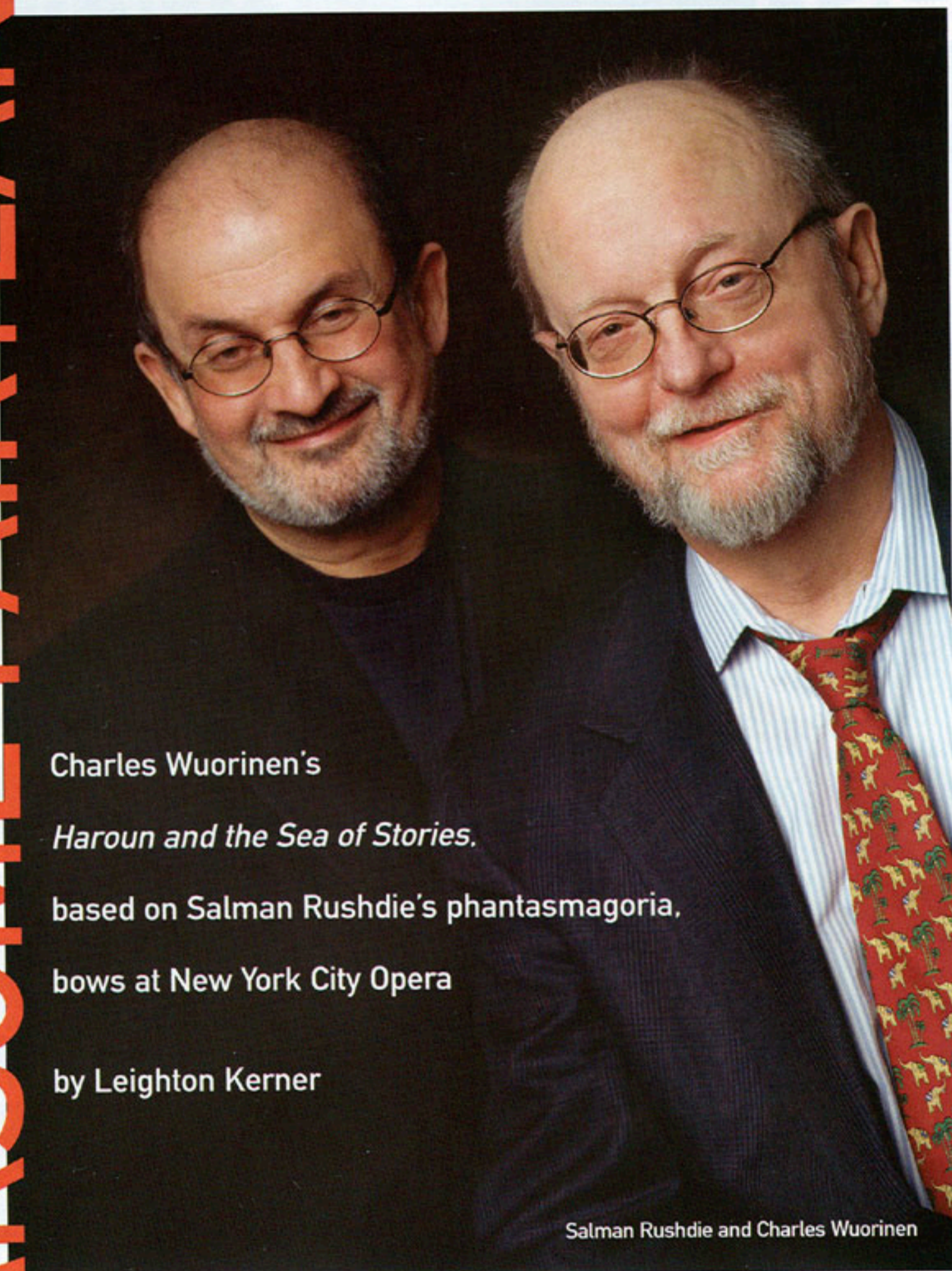


Charles Wuorinen's
Haroun and the Sea of Stories,
 based on Salman Rushdie's phantasmagoria,
 bows at New York City Opera
 by Leighton Kerner



Salman Rushdie and Charles Wuorinen

Fix your anticipating mind, if you will, on the idea of a new, sophisticated, adult fantasy-opera based on an equivalently sophisticated children's novel written by a man under a death sentence. Consider further that the novel and opera joyously and poetically relate a young boy's adventures in winning a war against extraterrestrial forces of ignorance and spiritual darkness (not quite like the earthly forces that condemned the book's author). Also, don't ignore — as if a listener could — the fact that the opera continually sends its twelve-tone musical language dancing in light-footed, infectious riffs, yet often calms down to sing soft little elegies. And what can one say about a libretto with such a characteristic stage direction as "Haroun takes a cup, dips into the sea, and drinks a story"?

The opera in question, as you may have guessed from that stage direction, is *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, based on Salman Rushdie's eponymous 1990 novel. The composer is New York's Charles Wuorinen, who continues to give academically aggressive modernism a lively name. The librettist is the English poet, politically fiery international journalist, and Rushdie friend and enthusiast James Fenton; the director of New York City Opera's world-premiere production, now in preparation for an October 31 opening, is Mark Lamos, a good man for keeping audiences awake at City Opera, the Met, Glimmerglass and points West.

The ceaselessly delightful novel was written somewhere near "the valley of the shadow of

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