

## Work of Scalia, Ginsburg inspiration for new opera

By MARK SHERMAN, Associated Press  
Updated 6:10 am, Tuesday, August 6, 2013

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WASHINGTON (AP) — He's a tenor stuck in the 18th century. She's a soprano who evolves over time.

They fight like cats and dogs at work, but somehow forge and maintain a beautiful friendship.

It's "Scalia/Ginsburg," the opera by award-winning composer Derrick Wang, who just graduated from the University of Maryland law school.

Justices Antonin Scalia, with his devotion to the Constitution's original meaning, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, more willing to adapt the Constitution to changing times, are ideological opposites and longtime friends with a mutual love of opera.

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The idea of setting their words to music came to Wang, 29, when he was studying constitutional law and reading Scalia's often fiery and well-constructed dissents. Ginsburg's responses had their own lyricism, he said.

And so he wrote an aria for the Scalia character in the 18th century style known as opera seria in which Scalia rages about justices who want the Constitution to mean whatever they think it should mean — just as he does in real life.

Scalia fumes: "The justices are blind. How can they spout this? The Constitution says absolutely nothing about this."

The response from Ginsburg begins in a 19th century style, but becomes more modern along the way, Wang said.

"How many times must I tell you, dear Mister Justice Scalia: You'd spare us such pain if you'd just entertain this idea," Ginsburg says. "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."

Wang previewed his work during a private audience with the two justices in late June, the day after the court issued its final opinions for the session and struck down part a federal anti-gay marriage law. Scalia read his dissent aloud in U.S. v. Windsor.

Ginsburg said the timing was perfect, "that after Scalia's stirring statement in the Windsor case, that we should end up on this note emphasizing the importance of collegiality."

"If they can get along and be friends, there's no excuse for the rest of us," Wang said in a telephone interview, two days after he finished taking the Maryland bar exam.

He said he plans to devote himself to finishing the one-hour opera so that it is ready for a premiere in Washington next year — maybe even at the court, Ginsburg said.

She said some friends told her she should have insisted on top billing. The justice was not about to lobby for a change. "I said, first of all it sounds better, and second, everything here is done by seniority," said Ginsburg, seven years Scalia's junior as a justice.

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More than 10 years have passed since then-Chief Justice William Rehnquist broke ground on the first major renovation of the Supreme Court since the building opened in 1935.

As Rehnquist's successor noted recently, the landscaping phase of the project is still going on. "Things are so dug up in the area, you'd think we were looking for Jimmy Hoffa or something," Chief Justice John Roberts said at a conference in West Virginia.

Renovations often don't go exactly according to plan and the court project has been no exception. Faulty measurements meant that a first set of replacement windows didn't fit. More recently, someone discovered that the amount of dirt workers were planning to pour in the garden on the north side of the building would have threatened the collapse of the police offices beneath the court.

So workers installed dozens of large, space-eating lightweight foam panels to protect the police below.

A separate problem involves the court's iconic front, which is covered with scaffolding for repairs to the building's marble. A basketball-sized piece of marble molding fell from the facade over the entrance to the court in 2005.

All of the work now is supposed to be done early next year.

Roberts isn't so sure, likening the project to a paradox described by the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea. The point of the paradox is that motion is an illusion. "That's apparently how our construction project is going," he said.

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