A comic operetta about a housewife, a birdman and the golden cage that separates dreams from nightmare.

Story, words & music by
Deborah Henson-Conant

"It's not exactly your conventional woman-meets-man story. Consider:

Birdman is blown by a storm to a mountaintop, where he meets the ultimate housewife in her golden cage carved into a 500,000-foot-high granite cliff.

Weary of his wanderings, the half-man, half-bird schemes to take possession of her home. He rips the bars from her cage, coaxes her to the top of the mountain and … pushes her to her death.

Then he gloatingly takes up residence. A safe home at last! But wait – now he is the one who can't get out."

San Francisco Chronicle

THE GOLDEN CAGE

A Musical Fable
Book, Lyrics & Music by Deborah Henson-Conant

A world-weary birdman and the ultimate housewife meet atop a 500,000-foot-granite cliff and wage a deadly battle of wills over a golden cage – a battle that ultimately saves both their lives.

Synopsis

In the midst of black wilderness, 500,000 feet in the air on the edge of sheer granite cliff, BORIS ORIDNIKOV SLEPNIC O'HARA, half-bird/half-man, emerges wet and bedraggled. After spurting the names of half the cities in the world, boasting "you can't name a place that I haven't been there," Boris soberly admits to himself that right now, however, he's lost, and that the one place he dreams of being just that, a dream: the legendary Golden Cage of birdman lore, his tribe's Valhalla, Heaven, Home. In a lament of longing for this one place he could call his own, he sings himself to sleep. As his eyes close, the sun begins to rise, and slowly his surroundings are revealed. He's asleep on the roof of a golden cage of his exact description.

But the cage isn't empty. As Boris falls asleep, ALPHEA J. SIMPSON-HUGHES, the ultimate housewife, is just waking up in this solitary prison. She begins her daily routine of complaining and diary-writing when Boris's snoring startles her. Convinced the noise is a monster, she prepares to battle it or die.

When she discovers the "monster" is a bizarrely appealing winged man, she's completely thrown. She's been isolated as long as she can remember. Not only does she have company for the first time in memory, but he's calling into question the very nature of her prison, telling her this cell of cement and iron is really a treasure, a golden cage.

Boris is struck by his luck at finding the cage, and the tragedy of it belonging to someone else. He's mystified by Alphea's conviction that the cage is made of cement and iron – even when he pulls out a bar and holds it in front of her, she can't see it. Slowly it dawns on him that she's mad, and if he can coax her out of the cage, he can make it his own. Intoxicated by dreams of being in the cage, he

plots to murder her by playing into her vivid imagination ("Humor Her Madness"), convincing her she can fly and pushing her off the cliff.

Boris mesmerized Alphea with visions of freedom and flight ("The Flying Song"), convinces her she can fly ("you only get the wings afterwards, to prove that you did it"), then concocts a complicated rite of passage he claims will make the cage penetrable. She follows his plan to the letter ("Incantation Duet"), but at the last minute panics and balks ("My House is Nice Like This"). Maddened by desire for the cage, Boris rips the bars out, confronts her, lures her out onto the cliff and then pushes her off.

Even as her cry is still fading, he turns with glee, rushes into the cage and replaces the bars ("Mine"). Gloating and preening ("Now The Dream is in My Hand"), he's unaware that the cage is slowly changing. The golden bars change to cement and iron and he realizes that even the rich library of books are just painted onto the walls. He, too, is changing and despite himself he opens Alphea's diary, and begins to write about his own complaining misery.

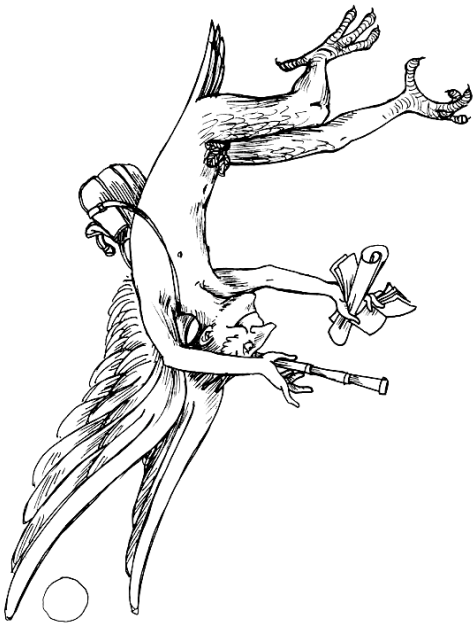
The horror of what he's done dawns on him and as he relives the steps that led to this tragedy ("First Came the Dream"), his wings shrivel and drop to the floor as he collapses onto Alphea's diary.

He's startled by a shriek and a scuffle and, looking out the window, sees the most horrifying scene yet: Alphea's avenging ghost-angel outside the bars. Only the ghost-angel thinks a live Alphea with wings, and Alphea for whom all Boris's lies have come true.

Together they piece together the truth: that this cage is a place of refuge and peace so long as the bars are left open. Once they're closed, once "outside" and "inside" are defined, it is a prison. Together they'll share it and somehow learn to balance security and freedom. The two sing the finale "All Your Life"

Characters

Boris Oridnikov Slepnik O'Hara – Tenor/Baritone; legitimate voice



Alphea J. Simpson-Hughes: Soprano/Mezzo; operatic range (for opera parody); legitimate voice

Stage Set

There are no set changes in "The Golden Cage." This can be done as a One-Act or Two-Act play. It can be staged in a very simple chamber opera setting, though the play calls for at least 2 different playing levels. The original production utilized a simple wooden structure and several different-sized boxes for playing areas.

Instrumentation

Original production used Piano, Cello & Drumset; it can also be done using the piano-vocal scores

Period & Costumes

This is a fantasy so realism in the costuming is not important and might even be counterproductive.

- Alphea is the quintessential frumpy housewife, with housedress, apron, curlers and bedroom slippers.
- Boris is a birdman – with feathers and wings

Choreography

Originally this play was done with no choreography

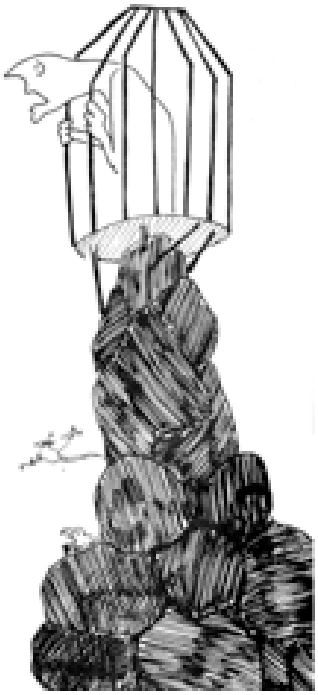
Lighting & Special Effects

Originally this play was done with basic theater lighting

Scenes & Musical Numbers

One Act vs Two Act: "The Golden Cage" was originally written and performed as a single act, but it can be broken into two acts if necessary, the break coming between Scene 3 and 4.

	Overture – *Instrumental*	Instrumental
SCENE 1	"Travel Patter" - *Song*	Boris
	"I started out in Philly…"	
	"Boris's Dream" - *Song*	Boris
	"Some may dream of a silver castle…"	
SCENE 2	"Today" - *Song*	Alphea
	"Nothing's Ever New" - *Song*	Alphea
	"Monsterphobia" – *Song*	Alphea
	Dialogue *(character's first meeting)*	Alphea & Boris
	"Golden Cage" - *Song*	Alphea & Boris
	"Can't You See?" – *Song*	Alphea & Boris
SCENE 3	Dialogue – *("Prisoner of Fate" intro)*	
	"Prisoner of Fate" - *Song*	Alphea
	Dialogue – *("But you could get out…)*	Boris & Alphea
	"Humor Her Madness" - *Song*	Boris
	"Then At Last" - *Song*	Boris & Alphea
	"The Seduction" – *Song*	Boris & Alphea
	"Flying Song" - *Song*	Boris & Alphea
	Interlude – *Instrumental*	Instrumental
	"A Capella Duet" – *Song ("I believe in you)*	Boris & Alphea
SCENE 4	Dialogue – *("I can't fly…" and Incantation tutorial)*	Boris & Alphea
	"Incantation Duet" - *Song*	Boris & Alphea
	Dialogue *("What if I'm not meant to be free?")*	Boris & Alphea
	"My House is Nice Like This" - *Song*	Alphea
	"Flying Song Reprise" – *Song*	Alphea & Boris
SCENE 5	"It's Mine!" - *Song*	Boris
	"Gone" – *Song*	Boris
	Monologue *("The prison is for me.")*	Boris
	"First Came the Dream" - *Song*	Boris
	"Flying Song Reprise" - *Song*	Boris & Alphea
	Dialogue	Boris & Alphea
	Finale: "All Your Life" - *Song*	Alphea & Boris
	Bow Music	



The Golden Cage Musical Numbers

- **Overture** *Instrumental*
- **Travel Patter** *("I started out in Philly…" / "I've Been There") Boris*
- **Boris's Dream** *("Some may dream of a silver castle…") Boris*
- **Today** *Alphea*
- **Monsterphobia** *("Something's rustling at the window…") Alphea*
- **Golden Cage** *("Here I am in my Golden Cage…") Duet*
- **Prisoner of Fate** *Alphea*
- **Humor Her Madness Intro (#1)** *("It just goes to show…") Boris*
- **Humor Her Madness Intro (#2)** *("What colors …) Boris*
- **Humor Her Madness** *Boris*
- **Then At Last** *("Then, at last, the curtain opens…") Duet*
- **The Seduction** ("Alphea, have you ever seen…) *Boris*
- **Flying Song** *("The rhythm, the music …") Duet*
- **Interlude** *Piano*
- **A Capella Duet** *("All my life…") Duet*
- **Incantation Duet** *Duet*
- **My House is Nice Like This (#1)** *("Look at the way the sunlight glitters…) Alphea*
- **My House is Nice Like This (#2)** *("I belong inside this portrait of life…") Duet*
- **Flying Song Reprise** *Duet*
- **Mine!** *Boris*
- **Now At Last (Reprise)** *Boris*
- **First Came the Dream** *Boris*
- **Gone** *Boris (and Alphea)*
- **Finale: All Your Life** *Duet*