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John Malkovich's serial-killer 'opera' coming to DVD

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Fans of John Malkovich have a number of opportunities this year to bask in the actor's eccentricity with the releases of the movies "Jonah Hex" and "Secretariat." But for an undiluted, 100-proof shot of pure Malkovich, your best bet is the new DVD of his stage performance in "The Infernal Comedy," which is being released in June.

The pseudo-opera -- actually a drama for one actor, two opera singers and an orchestra -- was recorded at a 2009 performance at Vienna's Ronacher Theater with the Orchester Wiener Akademie. The production recounts the life of Jack Unterweger (Malkovich), the Austrian writer and serial killer who murdered a number of prostitutes in Europe and Los Angeles.

Unterweger was arrested in 1992 and jailed in Austria. He hanged himself in prison in 1994.

"The Infernal Comedy" imagines the killer coming back from the dead as part of a book tour to promote his latest memoirs. For much of the production, Malkovich is seated at a table where he recites a comic monologue about his character's life, loves and dangerous liaisons.

Throughout the show, Malkovich interacts with two opera singers who perform arias by Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn and more. The singers represent the various women in the murderer's life, including his mother and some of the prostitutes he killed.

The production, which is scripted by Martin Sturminger, first [debuted in 2008 in Santa Monica](#), where Malkovich performed with the baroque ensemble Musica Angelica, led by Martin Haselbock. Times critic Mark Swed [wrote](#) that the L.A. production (which was then titled "Seduction and Despair") "needs a real score and a genuine production. The skeleton of something meaningful is there, and I hope [they] take the next step."

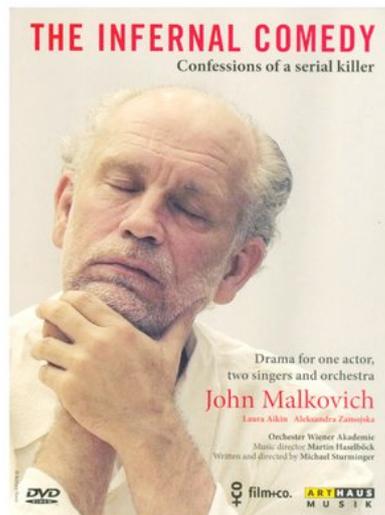
In 2009, the creators indeed took the next step by [taking a revised version of the show on a tour](#) with stops in Austria, France and Spain. The show recently played in Hamburg, Germany, and is [scheduled to play at London's Barbican Center](#) in June 2011.

The idea for the show came in part from costume designer Birgit Hutter, who had previously worked with Malkovich on the movie "Klimt." Hutter, who is Austrian, said in a phone interview that she was in L.A. a few years ago when she read about a new biography on Unterweger, written by journalist John Leake. She mentioned the book to Malkovich and from there the concept for the production was born.

Sturminger, who is a noted European opera director, wrote the text for the show. "The whole project was developed and written for John to play it -- so it was his coolness/seductiveness that inspired the text," he said in an e-mail interview.

"Unterweger's character and story seemed to provide us with the perfect material to animate John's incredible skills of embodying passion and irony -- even at the same time."

The DVD version, which comes in Region 0 formatting (it can be played on any DVD player), includes rehearsal footage and a history of Unterweger's crimes.



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