



ROYAL  
OPERA  
HOUSE

23 November 2020

Press Release

**The Royal Opera House presents *Current, Rising*,  
the world's first opera in hyper reality**

From 19 December 2020 the Royal Opera House will present the world's first opera in hyper reality: *Current, Rising* - a unique collaboration between the Royal Opera House's innovation programme, Audience Labs, award-winning Figment Productions and Royal Holloway, University of London.

Developed by a female-led creative team and funded by UK Research and Innovation, *Current, Rising* is a timely experiment blending historic stagecraft, artistic excellence and cutting-edge technology – a radical new way of seeing opera which puts the audience at the centre of the performance. *Current, Rising* is a 15-minute hyper reality opera experience, combining virtual reality with a multisensory set, inviting audiences to step into a bespoke 'Opera Tardis' and experience a dream-like journey carried musically by a poem layered in song.

The experience will take place in the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre from 19 December to 17 January and will strictly adhere to social distancing guidelines. Tickets will be available to buy from 4 December via our [website](#).

Inspired by the liberation of Ariel at the end of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *Current, Rising* will take four people at a time into its magical universe, traversing together the landscapes of the night, from twilight to dawn, exploring ideas of isolation, connection and collective reimagination – a powerful experience of our time.

*Current, Rising* is directed by video pioneer, Netia Jones, hailed as 'one of the most imaginative directors of opera working in Britain today' (The Observer). It is designed by award-winning designer Jo Scotcher, who trained at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and is composed by renowned composer Samantha Fernando. Featuring in the experience is soprano, Anna Dennis, noted for her work in both baroque and contemporary music and recently described as a 'delectable soprano and a serene, ever-sentient presence' (The Times).

The Royal Opera House will also go behind the scenes of *Current, Rising* in an Insight Event featuring interviews with the creative team, exploring the creative process, technology and composition of this extraordinary piece. Date to be confirmed.

**Annette Mees, Head, Audience Labs, Royal Opera House says;** *“The ambition for Current, Rising is to transport audiences to a visionary new opera landscape by exploring the transformative power of digital technology. With Audience Labs we have been delving deep to uncover the extraordinary possibilities of what happens when you blend technology with artistic expression. Current, Rising is a perfect illustration of our work and demonstrates a vision for the future of cultural forms, encapsulating a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of what opera calls “gesamtkunstwerk” (a work of Total Art); a new form, rooted in stage tradition, enriched by the magic of technology”.*

**Netia Jones, Director, Current, Rising says;** *“With Current, Rising, we have been exploring the possibilities of VR to expand the idea of what an opera can be, both in the process of creation, and in the audience experience. VR challenges all the traditional hierarchies of opera and classical music, and allows a completely different approach. It is the most democratic of all media - it can subvert the laws of physics so why would it need to conform to the usual rules of cultural exchange? It provides a space where music, the visual world and the physical experience are completely enmeshed, changing the relationships between the creators, the usual sequence of creation, and the relationship of the audience to the work. Here the audience are the protagonists, they are inside the work, and their physical experience is a part of the work itself.”*

**Simon Reveley, CEO, Figment Productions says;** *“Our partnership with the Royal Opera House has allowed us to create a truly unique piece of work, one that extends beyond the reach of this production and brings learning to this new cultural field. Over the past three years we have developed a ‘hyper reality’ platform to enable a group of people to move freely around a virtual world in a shared space, seeing each other as avatars and exploring a world that features real world effects like wind, rumble, movement and tactile objects. Figment are thrilled to share this prescient concept with the public pushing the envelope of collaboration across diverse creative industries.”*

**Alex Beard, Chief Executive, Royal Opera House says;** *“We are thrilled to launch Current, Rising as part of the Royal Opera House autumn programme 2020 – this has been two years in the making, a perfectly formed experiment and proud illustration of our work, reimagining, prototyping and presenting opera and ballet in bold new ways”.*

**Andrew Chitty, Audience of the Future Challenge Director, UK Research and Innovation, says;** *“The new immersive technologies of virtual, augmented and mixed reality are changing how we experience the world around us – from entertainment to sports, museums, shops and classrooms. Our £39m Audience of the Future challenge fund has brought together creative businesses, researchers and technology experts to create striking new experiences that will captivate the public’s imagination but also explore how these new technologies will transform the way we make things – from film and games to theatre and opera. I’m sure that the lessons learned from the brilliant Current, Rising can show the way forward for a whole sector.”*

**Professor Mark Lycett, StoryFutures Business innovation Lead at Royal Holloway, University of London says;** *“Current, Rising is testament to the innovation that digital technology can bring to the tradition of the creative industries – in terms of both artistic expression and the methods of production. Given the*

*ongoing challenges of the global pandemic , Current, Rising exemplifies the tenacity of the creative industries in the face of challenge, demonstrates the ability to tell compelling stories using cutting edge technologies and provides a chance to evaluate how audiences respond to digital creative experiences at scale."*

**Ends**

## **Notes to Editors**

Images [here](#) and [here](#)

Video [here](#)

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**Please note** that all ROH performances and participating artists are subject to change due to COVID-19 restrictions. In order to ensure the safety of artists and creative teams and to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, mitigations have included strict social distancing in the rehearsal studio alongside testing for those in physical contact during rehearsal, administered privately at no expense to the NHS.

With the safety of audiences and our community of staff and artists at their heart, significant mitigations have been put in place across the organisation to ensure we can bring audiences the best of our art forms while preventing any further spread of COVID-19.

All livestreams are available via: [stream.roh.org.uk](http://stream.roh.org.uk), available for 30 days on demand.

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## **About Current Rising**

*Current, Rising* is a collaboration with Royal Holloway, University of London as part of StoryFutures which places innovative storytelling at the heart of next generation immersive technologies and experiences, and has received funding support from The Audience of the Future Challenge, delivered by UK Research and Innovation as part of the government's Industrial Strategy.

## **About the Royal Opera House**

Home to The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House our vision is to give everyone access to exceptional ballet and opera.

Since closing our doors due to the global pandemic in March 2020, the Royal Opera House has continued to bring together the world's most extraordinary artists and curated the

#OurHouseToYourHouse programme of 19 streams, 4 socially distanced live concerts and a suite of online content that has been viewed over 315 million times in 183 countries.

The Royal Opera House continues its #OurHouseToYourHouse programme this autumn, bringing audiences the best of the ROH through a new series of live performances, cinema screenings, Friday Premieres and cultural highlights in partnership with the BBC and Sky Arts.

The Royal Opera House is committed to widening participation and deepening learning for all ages. This summer we launched Create and Learn, offering free online home-learning opportunities for children and young people. In addition, The Royal Ballet partnered with Cast and Doncaster Council to support Doncaster residents with online resources and remote direction to create a unique community dance film, Doncaster Dances.

### **About Royal Opera House Audience Labs**

[Audience Labs](#) at the Royal Opera House is an artist-led innovation program that brings together pioneering artists and next generation technology to create boundary-breaking contemporary opera and ballet experiences. Rooted in the Royal Opera House's tradition of stagecraft and alive to the possibilities of immersive technologies, Audience Labs invites new and diverse audiences to experience ambitious and innovative work - wherever they are. Audience Labs works through partnerships and a diverse range of collaborators from artists to major international technology companies to government departments, museums, festivals and more. Committed to sharing learnings and insight from R&D and projects and serving as a resource for the UK arts sector, Audience Labs aim to spark a dialogue around collaboration and innovation, enabling connections between cultural organisations and the technology sector and bringing together diverse creative talent, reducing barriers to entry and improving opportunity for digital adoption.

[www.roh.org.uk/about/audience-labs](http://www.roh.org.uk/about/audience-labs)

### **About Figment Productions**

[Figment](#) has delivered over 4 million VR experiences to leisure customers. They are best known for creating Derren Brown's Ghost Train, Thorpe Park (2017), Galactica, the world's first rollercoaster dedicated to VR, Alton Towers (2016), Kraken Unleashed, SeaWorld Orlando (2017), and The Great Lego Race, a VR Rollercoaster experience launched in numerous Legoland Resorts worldwide (2018). Figment are now focusing on Hyper Reality technology and experiences and have developed their own technology platform which combines full-motion, free-roaming VR with tactile props and sets, physical 4D effects, and a unique multi-user, realistic avatar system.

<https://figmentproductions.co.uk>

### **About StoryFutures, led by Royal Holloway, University of London**

[StoryFutures](#) places innovative storytelling at the heart of next-generation immersive technologies and experiences, to fuel the growth of the sector and ensure the UK is leading the way. StoryFutures is led by Royal Holloway, University of London and is part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's unprecedented Creative Industries Clusters Programme. Funded by the government's industrial strategy challenge fund and based in the 'Gateway Cluster' immediately to the west of London, StoryFutures is focused on delivering game-changing R&D projects.

[www.storyfutures.com/creative-cluster](http://www.storyfutures.com/creative-cluster)

[www.royalholloway.ac.uk](http://www.royalholloway.ac.uk)

## **About UKRI and the Audience of the Future Challenge**

Current, Rising has been supported by the Audience of the Future challenge, led by Challenge Director Prof Andrew Chitty. Audience of the Future was established to bring together creative businesses, researchers and technology experts to create striking new experiences that will captivate the public's imagination and to stimulate innovation in production technologies to make content faster, cheaper and easier to produce. By capturing the world's attention, their work will help grow the UK's leading market position in creative content in this new wave of innovation.

The £39m Audience of the Future is supported by the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, which is delivered by UK Research and Innovation and was announced by government in March 2018 as a core component of the Creative Industries Sector Deal.

New immersive technologies such as virtual, augmented and mixed reality are changing how we experience the world around us – from entertainment to sports, museums, shops and classrooms. It is estimated that by 2023 the global immersive technology market will be worth between \$95 billion and \$105 billion. In the UK, we have around 1,000 companies specialising in immersive, generating £660 million in sales. I have a feeling these predictions will turn out to be underestimates. With our world-class creative businesses, researchers and technologists, and our expertise in arts, design, and computer science, Government has seen the opportunity for the UK to establish itself as the world's most innovative economy.

The Industrial Strategy includes a range of measures to improve our ability to turn new ideas into commercial products - including investing £725m in new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund programmes. The Creative Industries Sector Deal was announced in March 2018 and leverages £72 million of this funding to support creative innovation - with a further £50 million being committed by industry.

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## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Annette Mees, Head of Audience Labs, Royal Opera House**

Annette Mees is an award-winning artist and immersive theatre director working in the cross-over between performance and technology. She advises on the future of culture, artistic innovation, creative R&D and how to create new forms of art using the possibility of technology.

### **Simon Reveley, CEO, Figment Productions**

Simon Reveley is the founder of Figment Productions, who specialise in the creation of immersive content. His work as a writer, director and producer includes Derren Brown's Ghost Train at Thorpe Park and experiences for events and themes parks around the world including LEGOLAND SeaWorld, Orlando, Alton Towers.

### **Professor Mark Lycett, StoryFutures Business innovation Lead, Royal Holloway**

Mark Lycett specialises in the ways that value can be derived from big data. Prior to academia, he spent several years in industry in project management and consulting. At StoryFutures, Mark

leads on understanding future business models and value chains in the immersive sector, as well as working on specific innovation projects with SMEs.

### **Netia Jones, Director**

Netia Jones is a British director/designer and video artist working internationally in opera, staged concerts, performance and installation, using video, film and projected media in all of her work. A “leading video pioneer” (Times) “bringing intelligence and integrity to the task of bringing video into classical music” (Guardian) she is Director of Lightmap, a mixed media partnership with whom she has created video, film, installation and interactive media projects in the US, US and Europe, from large scale external projection mapping to multi projector integrated film in opera performances. Previous projects include Orphée (English National Opera), The Dark Mirror (Barbican), Least Like The Other (Irish National Opera), Alice in Wonderland (Barbican), Where the Wild Things Are (LA Philharmonic, Barbican, Aldeburgh Festival).

### **Samantha Fernando, Composer**

Samantha Fernando (b.1984) has worked with numerous ensembles including the Philharmonia Orchestra, Riot Ensemble, the choir of Selwyn College Cambridge, LOD Muziektheater (Ghent), Silbersee Vocal Ensemble (Amsterdam) and The London Sinfonietta. Her music has been performed at festivals here and abroad such as Aldeburgh Music, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Sounds New, Gaudeamus Muziekweek, York Late Music, Lake District Summer Music and The Oxford Lieder Festival. In 2013, she was awarded an RPS Composition Prize. Samantha’s music has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and released on the labels NMC and Coviello Classics. In 2018 she was commissioned to write a new work celebrating the 50th birthday of the London Sinfonietta, premiered at the Royal Festival Hall in January 2018 and conducted by Vladimir Jurowski.

In 2019 her work Formations was choreographed by Kristen McNally and performed by the Royal Ballet in a showcase of new dance at the Linbury Theatre, ROH. Breathing Space for symphony orchestra was premiered by the Philharmonia Orchestra in Spring 2019, conducted by Martyn Brabbins. Commissions for 2020 include a new work, Have It All, for the BBC Singers.

### **Joanna Scotcher, Designer & CGI Art Director**

Joanna Scotcher is an multi award-winning production designer within the Live Arts industry. She is based in London, working across the UK and internationally. She recently received an Olivier Award for Best Costume Design for her work on Emilia, which also won The Olivier Award for Best Entertainment 2020. In 2011 she received Whatsonstage 'Best Set Designer' Award for The Railway Children, which also went on to win the Olivier Award for Best Entertainment.

Joanna trained at the RSC. She has since developed a unique path through the Arts & Theatre industry. Her work as production designer, specialises in creating unique and extraordinary experiences, inhabiting spaces from the intimate to the epic. Joanna’s diverse output includes

commissions from the RSC, Old Vic, Channel 4 Arts, The Royal Opera House, Kensington Palace, Covent Garden, European Olympic Committee and Unicef UK. Her recent theatre work includes productions at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Young Vic, Royal Court, Manchester Royal Exchange, Chichester Festival Theatre and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Her design work has been exhibited at the V&A Museum's 'From Gaga to Gormley' and the Royal Academy for Arts.

### **David Sheppard, Sound Designer**

David Sheppard is a sound designer with Sound Intermedia, his partnership with Ian Dearden. Together they have been leading collaborators on a diverse range of projects across the world. David works with many leading orchestras and ensembles as well as rock and pop musicians, visual artists, dance and film creatives. He collaborates closely with composers on helping them realise their ideas but he is also known as a sound installation artist and electronics performer in his own right. This year has seen design work with Music Theatre Wales and Royal Opera House before the pandemic turned his focus on immersive online mixes for YouTube and experiments in a new performance format utilising d&b Audiotechnika's Soundscape, including a reworking of Irish National operas recent Brian Irvine/Netia Jones creation, *Least Like The Other*.

David often works across art-forms including Mira Calix's *Inside There Falls* multimedia work for Sydney Festival, Christian Marclay at the White Cube, London, and collaborations with artist Matthew Ritchie and The National's Bryce and Aaron Dessner. He has consulted for Antony Gormley and devised and led learning projects including work with Björk on her Biophilia School. His design for the Opera: *Passion, Power and Politics* exhibition at the V&A in London was considered a "game-changer," with immersive and interactive sound throughout the installation. He often collaborates on new technologies and performance methods including the creation of an electro-magnetic harp and paper-speakers.

### **Melanie Wilson, Librettist**

Melanie Wilson is a UK based multi-disciplinary performance maker. Her acclaimed work is founded on the contemporary interplay between sound art, experimental forms of composition, language and live performance. She is a long term collaborator with director Katie Mitchell, for whom she makes music and sound for projects in U.K and Europe. Melanie's current work includes composition and sound for short film *Where I Go (When I Can't Be Where I Am)*, a BBC Culture in Quarantine commission, available now on iPlayer, and libretto and score for a new music/opera piece about parenthood and climate change, co-written by Jessica Latowicki and supported by Royal Court Theatre, PRS Foundation's Open Fund and Royal Opera House. Melanie is one of Sound and Music's New Voices 2020, funded by Arts Council England, PRS Foundation and Garfield Weston Foundation.

### **Anna Dennis, Soprano**

Described by the Times as a "delectable soprano and a serene, ever-sentient presence", Anna studied at the Royal Academy of Music. Notable concert performances have included Britten's *War Requiem* at the Berlin Philharmonie, a programme of Russian operatic arias with

Philharmonia Baroque in San Francisco, roles in all three Monteverdi operas in John Eliot Gardiner's world tour of

the Trilogy, Thomas Ades' Life Story accompanied by the composer at the Lincoln Centre's White Light Festival in New York, Orff's Carmina Burana and Pergolesi Stabat Mater with the Orquestra Gulbenkian in Lisbon, Bach's Christmas Oratorio with the OAE under Maasaki Suzuki, and Bach Cantatas with Les Violons du Roi in Quebec and Montreal conducted by Jonathan Cohen.

Her BBC Proms appearances include performances with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Britten Sinfonia and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Recent operatic roles include: Paride/Gluck's Paride ed Elena and Iphigenie/Iphigenie en Tauride (both Nürnberg Internationale Gluck Festspiele) Katherine Dee /DamonAlbarn's Dr Dee (English National Opera), Emira/Handel's Siroe, Rosmene/Handel's Imeneo and Florinda/Handel's Rodrigo (all under Laurence Cummings, Göttingen Händel Festspiele), Bersi/Andrea Chenier (Opera North) Ilia/ Idomeneo directed by Graham Vick (Birmingham Opera Company), Queen of the Night/Magic Flute (Clarion Society New York), Strawberry Seller & Strolling Player/Britten's Death in Venice (La Scala, Milan).

A keen interpreter of contemporary music, Anna has created roles in premieres of Francisco Coll's Cafe Kafka (Royal Opera House/Opera North/Aldeburgh), Jonathan Dove's The Walk From The Garden (Salisbury Festival) and The Enchanted Pig (Young Vic), Edward Rushton's The Shops (Bregenz Festspiele/Royal Opera House), Will Tuckett's Pleasure's Progress (Royal Opera House), and Yannis Kyriakides' An Ocean of Rain (Aldeburgh Festival/Amsterdam Muziekgebouw). Her recordings include Rameau's Anacreon of 1754 with the Orchestra of the Age Enlightenment, Handel's Siroe and Joshua with Laurence Cummings/ Festival Orchester Göttingen, Couperin's Lecons de Tenebre with Jonathan Cohen/Arcnagelo and a cd of Russian composer Elena Langer's chamber works, Landscape with Three People on the Harmonia Mundi label. Upcoming plans include Handel Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno at the new Zaryadye concert hall in Moscow, Pucell Indian Queen at the Opera de Lille with Emmanuelle Haim, Haydn Jahreszeiten with the Dusseldorfer Sinfoniker under Adam Fischer, and Handel Saeviat Tellus Inter Rigos with the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

### **Anna Morrisey, Movement Director**

Anna studied Archaeology and Anthropology and then went on to train in dance and then movement at Central School of Speech and Drama. She has worked as movement director and choreographer across theatre, opera and dance and her work has been shown on the West End, the National, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Opera House, the Young Vic and the Old Vic as well as many major regional venues and internationally. She has worked on many large scale public artworks including the London 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony, We Are Here (Jeremy Deller, NT) and Beyond The Deepening Shadows (Tower of London).

As a choreographer Anna has been commissioned to make dance theatre pieces by the RSC and Historic Royal Palaces, where she spent a year as Artist in Residence. She is currently under commission from Camden People's Theatre as part of their Outside The Box season. Anna is the movement director and choreographer on the the Olivier Award winning production of Emilia. Last year she directed A Midsummer Night's Dream for Nevill Holt Opera. Credits as Movement Director and Choreographer; Translations (National Theatre), ANNA (National Theatre), Imperium (West End, RSC), Swive [Elizabeth] (Shakespeare's Globe), Queen Anne (West End), Richard III, (Almeida Theatre), King Charles III (West End, Almeida Theatre, UK tour, Broadway), World of Extreme Happiness (National Theatre).