



ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE

Tuesday 15 June 2021

ROH Engender Festival returns for 2021 with a packed programme of events and an unmissable line-up of change-makers and creatives

Today The Royal Opera House is excited to announce the **Engender Festival** line-up for 2021. From **Monday 12 -17 July 2021**, join us at Covent Garden and online for a week of talks and debates, operas in progress, concerts and workshops with an unmissable line-up of artists, composers, change-makers and brilliant creatives.

Engender is The Royal Opera's initiative to change gender imbalance in opera and music theatre and drive towards gender equity in all areas of the opera field. The annual Engender Festival celebrates the work of women and gender minorities in opera and provides a platform for relevant discussions with audiences.

Kate Wyatt, Creative Producer for The Royal Opera and Founder of Engender explains: "Engender has been a highlight for me over the past year and it's been a pleasure to welcome members from further afield including South Africa, Egypt and the USA. Engender is a vital space for women and gender minorities in opera to connect, empower each other and identify practical ways to move the issue of gender equality forward, all the more essential with the ongoing impact of the pandemic. 18-months operating online has enabled the Network to grow in ways we had not imagined, both in number and ambition and now it's brilliant to be able to come back together in person. The Festival will amplify our

work, welcome more people to our discussions, present new work and ideas and share our future plans. Our ambition is to drive change in the sector and we encourage everyone to join us.”

A series of three **Opera-in-Progress** sessions in **Clore Studio** will offer an insight into the very start of making an opera, hearing from the artists how their ideas have emerged. On **Monday 12 July** interdisciplinary writer **Maria Fusco**, will discuss ***History of the Present***, a hybrid working-class opera that explores the resonances and legacies of the peacelines in Northern Ireland. With dramaturg **Jude Christian**, Maria will explore how socio-political issues can act as compelling subject matter, while shaping the creation process of the opera itself from its earliest stages.

Writer **Nadifa Mohamed** and composer **Nina Whiteman** will present ***The Fortune Men*** on **Wednesday 14 July**. Set in Tiger Bay, Cardiff, in the 1950s, this is the true story of a mixed-race couple wrenched apart by unjust circumstances. A rich tapestry of musical influences (calypso, sea shanties, Jewish cantors, Welsh male voice choirs) articulates the unfolding of a narrative in a post-war, industrial setting. This opera in progress gives an opportunity to explore how to translate ideas from page to stage.

Nadifa Mohamed, writer of The Fortune Men says: “Writing the lyrics to an opera was like leaping into fast flowing river; I've learned a lot, got overwhelmed a few times but have found myself, happily, in new territory. Allowing *The Fortune Men* to take on a new form has given it a renewed life and it has been wonderful taking such a solitary novel into the collaborative and noisy world of opera. I can't wait to reveal what Nina and I have developed to the audience at the Engender Festival.”

Director **Daisy Evans** and composer **Laura Bowler** are developing ***Lambs*** – an opera that takes the form of a podcast. On **Friday 16 July** through headphones audiences will listen to a host processing the lives of three fictional women incarcerated for the murder of their children. Combining live performance with pre-recorded soundscape and electronics, this is the first-time opera has been experienced or created in this way.

Closing the Festival on **Friday 16 and Saturday 17 July** in the beautiful **Linbury Theatre** will be ***MAMI WATA*** – a programme curated for the Festival by **Pegasus Opera**, providing a powerful and stirring experience. Conceived by **Alison Buchanan**, Artistic Director of Pegasus Opera, *Mami Wata* illuminates the rich and varied works from a range of established composers such as **Bushra El-Turk** and **Errollyn Wallen**, alongside music by **Nkeiru Okoye**, **Lettie Beckon Alston**, **Dorothy Rudd Moore** and **Nahla Mattar**, including UK premieres of unheard work. Presented by Pegasus Opera in association with the

Royal Opera House, this concert continues Pegasus Opera's work to champion diverse artists in opera, giving voice to a collection of work from trailblazing composers.

Directed by **TD. Moyo**, the works are performed by sopranos **Alison Buchanan**, **April Koyejo-Audiger** and Mezzo-sopranos **Camille Maalawy** and **Simone Ibett-Brown**.

Alison Buchanan, Artistic Director of Pegasus Opera says: "MAMI WATA is monumental and groundbreaking. It brings together female artists to celebrate the vocal works of diverse female composers. It is an introduction to a rich, varied, yet often unheard-of body of work. It reflects the huge shift in consciousness when it comes to diversity and inclusion. To have MAMI WATA at ROH, world leaders in opera is significant. 30 years ago, I was the first Black British woman to give a solo recital in the ROH crush bar after winning the Maggie Teyte. This time I share the stage as I honour and celebrate amazing women composers."

The Festival presents a rich digital output throughout the week. There will be two *Insights* streamed on YouTube across the week – on Monday 12 July opera journalist and critic **Alexandra Coghlan**, **Alison Buchanan** and soprano **Kate Royal** will explore the themes of 'gatekeeping' in opera and how it manifests. The second will study gender barriers through a different lens, as part of the **Shubbak Festival**, supported by the **British Council**, chaired by Theresa Ruth Howard, we are joined by artistic leaders from South Africa and Egypt to discuss gender equality through a different lens.

There will also be practical Zoom workshops on how to pitch yourself led by **Ilene Bergelson**, founder of Empower Speak and another on managing imposter syndrome led by **Lyndsey Oliver**, coach and author of *Why all Fish are Biased*.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- Tickets on sale now from ROH.org.uk
- This year's festival is in partnership with Pegasus Opera, The British Council and Shubbak Festival.
- Opera In Progress: All artists have received a Research and Development commission through the Royal Opera Engender initiative, which offers paid time and space for each creative team to

work together alongside bespoke mentorship, producer support and resources for studio time with singers and musicians.

- In 2022 Pegasus Opera Company will celebrate 30 years of advocacy for diversity in music.

At a glance:

Opera in Progress: History of the Present

Monday 12 July, 6pm

£8, Clore Studio

Insight: Gatekeeping in opera

Monday 12 July, 7.30pm

YouTube

Workshop: Pitching yourself... without pitching yourself

Tuesday 13 July, 7.00pm

Zoom event.

Available to Engender Network members only

Insight: Gender barriers through a different lens

Wednesday 14 July, 4:00pm

YouTube

Opera in Progress: The Fortune Men

Wednesday 14 July, 6pm

£8, Clore Studio

Workshop: Understanding and Managing Imposter Syndrome

Thursday 15 July, 12.00pm and 7.00pm

Zoom event.

Available to Engender Network members only

Opera in Progress: Lambs

Friday 16 July, 6pm

£8, Clore Studio

Mami Wata

Friday 16 & Saturday 17 July 2021, 7.30pm

£10–£25, Linbury Theatre

PRESS CONTACT

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About The Royal Opera

The Royal Opera, under the artistic direction of Antonio Pappano, Music Director, and Oliver Mears, Director of Opera, is one of the world's leading opera companies. Based in the iconic Covent Garden theatre, it is renowned both for its outstanding performances of traditional opera and for commissioning new works by today's leading opera composers.

About the Royal Opera House

Home to The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, the Royal Opera House brings together the world's most extraordinary artists in live, streamed and broadcast events and performances that thrill, move and excite; that transport people to other worlds. Our theatres are in London's Covent Garden but our work is accessed and experienced across the UK and globally through touring partnerships, cinema programmes, free outdoor screenings, radio, TV and live-streaming.

Since closing our doors due to the global pandemic in March 2020, the Royal Opera House continued to bring together the world's most extraordinary artists and curated the #OurHouseToYourHouse programme, made up of nine live concerts (six for opera, two for ballet and two galas), 38 streamed productions and a suite of online content that has been viewed over 15 million times in 183 countries,

together with a suite of cultural highlights in partnership with the BBC, Sky Arts and Netflix and a host of online home learning opportunities wherever you are in the country.

We are hugely excited to welcome people back to our theatres as soon as possible, showcasing the very best of our art forms and bringing the joy of live performance back to our audiences. We would like to thank everyone who continues to support our creative community as we get closer to re-opening our doors once again.

Royal Opera House Recovery Campaign

Live performance is a shared experience, and our audiences are at the heart of what we do on our stages, backstage, online, in cinemas and in our communities. The global pandemic has affected all arts organisations across the world. We have lost £3 in every £5 of our income, and our loan from Government takes us only part of the way. We need your help with our Recovery Campaign to bring our artists back to our stages. Roh.org.uk/donate

About Engender

Engender is The Royal Opera's initiative to change the gender imbalance in opera and music theatre and drive towards gender parity in all areas of the opera field. Engender aims to highlight and grow the wealth of women and non-binary talent both onstage and behind the scenes. Engender is a place for women and non-binary people to connect and support each other, to amplify the work of women and non-binary people in opera and to have a collective voice. Engender provides space and opportunity for personal and professional development, peer support and the creation of new work. Across the year Engender hosts conversations focused on gender in opera and exploring the challenges to achieving equality. We want to increase the gender diversity in the creative teams behind the work on our stages and increase the number of opportunities for women and non-binary people both as artists and backstage, in production, administration and planning, and across all areas of business. With support from the British Council, Engender is currently developing partnerships in South Africa and Egypt.