



ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE

Thursday 22 April 2021

**The Royal Opera announces *8bit* –
a series of 8 free digital operatic experiences, bringing together some
of the most innovative contemporary artists**

- **Eight short new operatic pieces by *Dumbworld*, Patrick Eakin Young, Elayce Ismail, Akhila Krishnan, Katie Mitchell, Anna Morrissey, André de Ridder and Katherine Manley, and Rakhi Singh.**
- **With century-spanning music: From Handel and Tchaikovsky to John Barber, Brian Irvine, Matt Huxley and Anna Meredith.**

On **Friday 30 April at 7pm GMT** we are excited to present *8bit* – a series of eight newly-commissioned, experimental experiences of digital opera – bringing together some of the most innovative contemporary artists.

Available for free, and hosted across Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, the eight short ‘bits’ comprise six short films, one audio performance and a web browser experiment, presenting well-loved repertory in ways audiences will never have experienced them before, as well as world premieres of new short works.

Created in response to the impact of Covid-19 on the arts (and not least the freelance community), ROH Director of Opera, Oliver Mears, Creative Producer Kate Wyatt and Producer Rachel Caccia commissioned an international cohort of collaborators who straddle both opera and technology to create short works of digital opera.

Oliver Mears, Director of The Royal Opera explains: ‘At a time when it is so hard to work together in the same place, let alone the same time, we have been forced to adapt and work in different ways. *8bit* links material that spans platforms and genres in an audio and visual moment of fabulous variety and eclecticism, challenging the stereotypes associated with opera.’

Audiences will be directed to a specially curated hub on the ROH website, where they will be guided through a global musical journey, from Berlin to Ellis Island and back to Covent Garden. Through music- and sound-driven performance, viewers will be encouraged to travel across a digital landscape and experience classical music and opera in stunning new ways.

Canadian-born director and dramaturg **Patrick Eakin Young** has created an 'Instagram opera' titled ***Among the Flowers*** - featuring a new composition by **Matt Huxley**, with vocals by **Lucy Goddard**. Patrick Eakin Young says: 'During the past year, through all the lockdowns, Instagram has been one of my main conduits to the outside world. I thought: what would it be like if I created an opera specifically for it? What would that look and sound like? What's so fascinating is that digital opera may change depending on the format that it's in, but it's still opera: it's still about storytelling, emotion and music.'

Katie Mitchell returns to ROH with a new collaboration with **Grant Gee** – a five-minute film to the soundtrack of **Anna Meredith's** 'Heal You' - featuring the voluntary work of ROH Chorister **Amanda Baldwin** at a London vaccination centre. The piece 'celebrates the vaccination rollout and the brilliance of women's contribution to that process,' explains Katie Mitchell.

German conductor and curator **André de Ridder** and soprano **Katherine Manley** collaborate on ***OVER/UNDER GROUND*** – where a single hand-held camera follows Katherine as she moves around public spaces in Berlin, taking the operatic voice (having been forced) out of its usual context performing 'Verso già l'alma col sangue' from **Handel's** *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*.

'I've always been interested in the possibilities of film with operatic content, beyond the filming of conventionally staged performances. The pandemic has furthered that interest and our little film is an exploration of that. We combined the contemporary sounds of **Mouse On Mars'** 'sonic auteur' Jan St. Werner with a classic Baroque aria which kind of gets lost over and underground the streets of Berlin, looking to find a place outside the theatre. We found new meaning in Aci's passage into isolation but also a mysterious, possible manifestation of a relationship triggered by a meeting with a stranger, maybe Galatea?' says André de Ridder.

Director and choreographer, **Anna Morrissey's** ***All Together Alone***, sees dancers of **The Royal Ballet** responding unchoreographed to the aria 'Ebben? ne andrò lontana' from **Catalani's** *La Wally*, reworked by **Ben and Max Ringham**, with vocals by Jette Parker Young Artist **Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha**.

Echoes at the Gate, a film by multidisciplinary video designer **Akhila Krishnan**, explores themes of immigration, identity and language, with a soundtrack of 'Akh! istomilas ya gorem' from **Tchaikovsky's** ***The Queen of Spades***. Akhila Krishnan notes: 'The main thinking behind this idea is to show that this music (that might seem to be very distanced/removed) for a young audience member actually speaks of universal, relevant and current ideas and themes.'

Making her ROH debut, violinist, collaborator and music director **Rakhi Singh** has crafted a music video with Director **Joe Morgan** titled ***FFAALL***, set to three different pieces of music by Rakhi herself, Seb Gainsborough and Nicola Matteis. Filmed in different spaces at the ROH during lockdown, the piece features Salford-based artist **Blackhaine** whose practice concerns deconstructive and exhaustive technique contained within sound, film and movement.

Theatre and opera director **Elayce Ismail** has worked with composer **John Barber** to create ***Our Dark Side and The Moon***, an anti-lullaby that meditates on our relationship to the Moon. With spoken narration by Elayce and vocals by **Nazan Fikret**, the listener is invited to take their device to a window or outside space to watch the Moon as they listen.

Elayce explains, “We made this audio piece for the end of lockdown as a bridge between the world inside your home and the world outside. Inspired by the Moon and recent Mars landings, and reflecting on the human desire to explore, exploit and colonise, this night time duet asks you to look, to listen, to dream and to question.”

Concluding the experience, artist-led creative production company **Dumbworld** have crafted an interactive web-based opera experience titled ***Fatal System Error***. Following the last digital breaths of a web bot, this piece features a new composition by **Brian Irvine**, performed by **Alexandra Lowe** (JPYA) and the **Orchestra of the Royal Opera House**.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- Available from Friday 30 April 2021, 7pm GMT.
- Ticket prices: FREE
- Please find images [here](#).

We encourage audiences to experience *8bit* in the below sequence:

Patrick Eakin Young, *Among The Flowers*

- Directed by Patrick Eakin Young
- Music by Matt Huxley
- Libretto by Samuel Kentridge
- Performed by Lucy Goddard
- Mixed by Ross Flight
- Watch on Instagram

Katie Mitchell, *Heal You*

- Music by Anna Meredith, performed by Juice Vocal Ensemble
- Video Grant Gee,
- Watch on YouTube

André de Ridder and Katherine Manley, *OVER/UNDER GROUND*

- Created by André de Ridder and Katherine Manley
A film by Ramin Aryaie & André de Ridder

Katherine Manley - Soprano

Miriam Arnold - Dancer

Directed by André de Ridder

Cinematography & Editing - Ramin Aryaie

Electronics/Music - Jan St Werner & G.F. Handel

Synthesizer - André de Ridder

Field Recording & Sound Design - Joel Jaffe

Additional Mixing - Valentin de Ridder

- Watch on YouTube

Anna Morrissey, *All Together Alone*

- Created by Anna Morrissey
- Composed by Ben and Max Ringham, after Alfredo Catalani
- Edited by Alexander Hutchinson
- Sung by Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha
- Danced by members of The Royal Ballet: Joshua Junker, Calvin Richardson, Francisco Serrano, Hannah Grennell, Nadia Mullova-Barley
- Watch on Facebook

Akhila Krishnan, *Echoes at the gate*

- Translation: Natasha Ward
- Thanks to Avinash Rajagopal and Katharina Houy
- Music: ROH 2019 recording of The Queen of Spades, 'Akh! istomilas ya gorem',
- Watch on Facebook

Rakhi Singh, *FFAALL*

- Music: How fallen, how changed - Rakhi Singh & Seb Gainsborough / Fantasia for solo violin – Nicola Matteis / A Poison Tree - Rakhi Singh
- Film directed & edited by: Joe Morgan
- Performers: Blackhaine, Mimi Doulton, Rakhi Singh & Nyhal Adams
- Watch on Youtube

Elayce Ismail, *Our Dark Side and The Moon: a night-time duet*

- Creator & Librettist, Elayce Ismail
- Composer: John Barber
- Narrator, Elayce Ismail

- The Moon, Nazan Fikret
- ROH Orchestra, conducted by Christopher Willis
- Viola: Judith Busbridge
- Cello: Hetty Snell
- Clarinet: Fergus Morrison
- Percussion: Nigel Charman and Simon Archer
- Watch on YouTube

Dumbworld, *Fatal System Error*

- Composer - Brian Irvine
- Writer & Director - John McIlduff
- Soprano – Alexandra Lowe (JPYA)
- ROH Orchestra, conducted by Christopher Willis
- Experience via a web browser linked from ROH website.

PRESS CONTACT

Chloe Westwood: chloe.westwood@roh.org.uk | Opera Press Lead

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

Trailers

Edits