

Member Magazine Issue 5 • January 2026

# RECIT



GRAND  
BOURNE

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## Recit Issue 5, January 2026

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Front cover photo: Cast backstage in  
Festival 2025's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, which  
will return in the Autumn Season 2026  
Photo: Graham Carlow

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# COME TOGETHER

CEO **Richard Davidson-Houston** describes the creation of the newly-formed UK Opera Association – set up to represent and champion the work of the opera sector.

For the first time, opera in the UK will have a collective voice – one that speaks with authority and unity. This may sound technocratic, but it matters profoundly. Opera is a national success story: a creative ecosystem that supports thousands of jobs, realises human potential and changes lives and communities through education and outreach. It also brings something harder to quantify but even more vital – a shared sense of imagination and joy. This good-news story has for too long been hidden behind lazy media clichés.

The newly inaugurated UK Opera Association (UKOA) will represent the interests of the whole sector – from mapping and collaboration to advocacy and events. Thangam Debbonaire (*pictured overleaf*) is its first CEO. She sent a note to all *Recit* readers: 'I know how much opera means to you as a Glyndebourne member and it also means that much to me. As a professional cellist, lifelong opera fan and former Shadow Culture Secretary I will be doing everything in my power to champion, advocate for and support this wonderful art form to thrive and grow. I look forward to seeing you at an opera soon!'

## How did we get here?

Controversial former boxer Mike Tyson once said that 'everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face'.

Three years ago, on the fourth day in my current role as CEO, I received a call from Arts Council England (ACE) to let us know our grant would be cut in half. Glyndebourne was never complacent about public funding for the Tour and had modelled various scenarios. However, this decision left us with no choice but to cancel the Glyndebourne Tour, which – unlike the Festival, which receives no public subsidy – received relatively modest funds from ACE. Later that same week, the full horror of what had happened was revealed. Public funding for opera in England had been cut by 30%. This decision would have startled ACE's founder John Maynard Keynes, who regarded opera as a core art form, vital to the nation's cultural life, and one of the main reasons that ACE needed to exist.

There was outcry. We indulged in a little grumbling ourselves, before redirecting our energy into action. What was done was done. Yet one question wouldn't go away: 'where was the evidence upon which such swingeing cuts had been based?'. ►



Evidence there was none. To its credit, ACE listened to its critics and quickly commissioned independent researchers to examine how the opera sector operates. The result was *Let's Create: Opera and Music Theatre Analysis* which is still available to read online (via [arts council.org.uk](https://arts council.org.uk)). The report generated its own controversy. I was vexed by the inclusion of so many unweighted and hard-to-substantiate opinions – but, aye, it was stimulating.

On the morning of its publication, several companies, including Glyndebourne, met to review its findings. We thought it better to align as a sector. Ironically – or perhaps predictably – one of the report's findings was that opera organisations ought to work together more effectively.

As the dust settled, that group continued to meet, and expanded. A movement had begun.

Before long, the idea was proposed to create a new sector body for opera in the UK; something comparable with the Association of British Orchestras or indeed the National Farmers' Union. A valiant previous attempt, staffed by volunteers, had quickly been stymied for various reasons, including Covid. This time, a powerful coalition has formed, bringing together voices representing many different scales of work, and steered by a core group comprising representatives from

Glyndebourne, Royal Ballet and Opera, Streetwise Opera, OperaUpClose, English Touring Opera, Pegasus Opera and the National Opera Studio. Together, we formulated, tested and proposed the ingredients for a new organisation – the UK Opera Association (UKOA) – with paid officials and a clear agenda.

ACE stepped up, offering seed funding, and as I write this, 20 companies have pledged to pay membership fees for three years which will provide stability for the new organisation.

After an extensive – some might say exhaustive! – process of consultation and trust-building across the sector, we identified key priorities and began the search for a CEO. The field was exceptional. Thangam Debbonaire, who until the last election had been the Shadow Culture Secretary, was among the candidates. Her passion for opera and credentials as a convener and advocate were un-turn-downable.

Glyndebourne has always been both independent and collaborative. We guard our autonomy fiercely, yet we know that our strength depends on a healthy, connected opera sector. That's why our involvement in founding the UKOA feels both pragmatic and true to our values.

I am proud of Glyndebourne's part in establishing a body that will not only defend but champion opera in the UK – for its impact on jobs, education, wellbeing, training... and joy. ●

Richard is Glyndebourne's Chief Executive Officer

# FEEDING INTO THE ECOSYSTEM

Many colleagues have honed their skills at other theatres before (and sometimes after) working at Glyndebourne as **Karen Anderson** finds out.

In the wake of the UK Opera Association being set up to represent the interests of the opera sector (see previous pages 3-4), it is a good time to note that an ecosystem within the industry already exists – one that is supportive, interlinked and helps theatres operate and survive. This is important because much of the workforce is often freelance, seasonal, temporary and so being able to work anywhere has become part of the job. Nowadays, if you are trained in a theatre or opera house your career doesn't necessarily stay there; transferable skills mean that you can work anywhere within the performing arts sphere, if the work exists. Wig makers and make-up artists can work at Glyndebourne and go on to work in television; costume and prop makers can move around and work in other theatres or with film studios.

'Some former colleagues, seasonal prop makers, have gone on to work in other theatres,' says Paul Brown, Head of Props & Scenic Workshop. 'Gemma Craddock and Juliet Lano both started out here and are now at Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO). Natalie Ryan, our former Workshop Supervisor, left to go and work in musicals, initially on *The Lion King*, then on *Mary Poppins* in the West End. But then we benefit from the training others receive elsewhere before they join us, it's an ever-evolving circle. However, most recently we've benefited from the boomerang effect – two of our former seasonal prop makers left to gain experience elsewhere and have returned into full time, permanent roles, which is really great for us.'

The two 'boomerangers' are Workshop Supervisor Amy White and Melissa (Mel) Snelling, Senior Prop Maker.

Mel worked at Glyndebourne from 2012 to 2016 on a rolling seasonal contract, she then left to join PropDog, a magic and stage illusions company, before returning to Glyndebourne in 2022. 'At PropDog I had to learn a whole new set of skills not regularly used in prop making. From making props that had to look convincing and beautiful, I suddenly had to make things that did something, serving a very niche purpose. I had spent most of my days sculpting and painting, and suddenly now I was learning how to make mechanical and electrical ►



↑ 'The answer to all life's problems is probably a magnet...' Senior Prop Maker Mel Snelling is pictured at the Members' Open Day (15 November 2025)

→ Vic Pyne, Head of Lighting, encourages and empowers her team to work in other theatres out of season

gimmicks. The work was very precise and required machinery I had never used before. Learning new technologies like how to 3D print, laser cutting, and most importantly, that the answer to all life's problems is probably a magnet...' Mel says. 'I put this to good use when I returned to Glyndebourne and worked on *Semele*. The climax of the show is our heroine Semele being burnt alive in a large iron maiden. Putting a performer into a burning cage and ensuring we could get her out and away safely before the big ignition was key. Everything we used to create the illusion had to be flame proof and be able to withstand extreme temperatures. Our technique involved a gas burner system, self-igniting paper that looked like metal, loads of magnets (obviously) – and the rest was magic!' For the Props department Mel's specialities include mould-making and casting, new technologies and anything that needs to do something a bit odd. A veritable feast of talents.

Amy was a seasonal prop maker in 2012 and 2013 before she left Glyndebourne to join Disney Cruise Lines, where she was a prop and puppet technician on their ships. Amy's role was to fix the scenery, props and puppets ship-wide, and to help the shows run smoothly. There were five shows on the ship at any time. 'I was kept very busy!' she says. Amy worked on three ships – *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder* (2,700 passengers) and the *Disney Dream* (4,000 passengers) – working for three months, followed by two months off over a two-year period. 'I had to learn the different shows on each ship, and I was responsible for the safety of the changeover of sets; the running tracks in the shows; and knowing the contingency plans if things didn't work.'

As a multiskilled prop maker, following this Amy worked at Set Up Scenery, in Cheshire, as a prop maker/carpenter on large construction props, then moved to All Scene, All Props in Tunbridge Wells. Following other full-time and freelance projects she returned to manage the workshop at Glyndebourne in 2023. 'I learnt a lot of skills during my time away, all of which help me now', Amy says. 'I learnt how to communicate better and manage difficult situations, to remain authoritative and calm under pressure. Now I'm back at Glyndebourne. It is great to be working with colleagues and friends again in the Production Hub – when I was here before our workspace was like a big drafty shed, but now I'm in this fantastic building! I feel that I've come home.'



Sam Stephenson

Head of Lighting, Vic Pyne – a boomeranger herself who worked here for one season in 1999 as a lighting technician (taking up her current role here in 2017) – feels that her time as a freelancer was important to her career progression. 'As well as working at Scottish Opera, Garsington and English National Opera (ENO) in permanent roles, my time as a freelance lighting programmer introduced me to so much, and so many people in the industry,' she says. As Vic employs seasonal freelancers every year she is altruistic in her outlook. 'I try to help my colleagues to find work when their contracts finish with us in the hope that they'll come back and work with us next season' she explains. 'They gain more experience, which helps their work here, and make more contacts within the industry, each contributing to the ecosystem that we're all part of.' She is at pains to note that any work freelancers get is on their own merit, not through nepotism. 'I just point them in the right direction, and help empower them to go for jobs that they might not otherwise have gone for.'

Those Vic has empowered include Jasmine Hoi Ching Tom, assistant lighting technician in Festival 2025 who worked with ENO on its autumn season and will be back here for Festival 2026. Assistant lighting technician Bree Maddrell-Mander, who worked with us throughout 2025, is currently working with Willie Williams, lighting designer for U2 and David Bowie among others, workshopping a project destined for a European tour next year. Lighting technician Sam Bernstein is working with Miguel Figueiredo at the Donmar Warehouse, and is set to go on to work with lighting designer Peter Mumford (who created the lighting designs for our productions of *La traviata* and *Semele*) at the Hampstead Theatre. Connor Sullivan and Charlie Warren are now working with Ben Cracknell (Lighting Designer, *The Merry Widow* in Festival 2024). ●



Graham Carlow

# COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

**Karen Anderson** talks to **Paul Brown** about the commercial props his team are making for other theatres and the experience this offers.

You'll find Glyndebourne's Props & Scenic Workshop in the heart of the Production Hub – a massive, light and airy space with a vaulted ceiling ideal for crafting small intricate work alongside huge props and scenic elements. It is so ideal in fact that it has, since 2022, been making props for other theatres in a commercial venture that has really taken off.

'Our first project was *Don Quixote* for Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB)' explains Paul Brown, Head of Props & Scenic Workshop. 'David Pritchard, who worked as production consultant for Glyndebourne for several years also worked at BRB, and as they didn't have their own in-house props team, asked if we'd be interested in helping them out.' As Glyndebourne had the space and a permanent team of seven, with three seasonal staff that could increase if work demands grew, it was a sensible business decision that everyone could benefit from. 'All of our costs are covered, we make some profit, and our prop makers get to make new things into the bargain,' Paul adds. 'Ballet has different prop requirements to opera. Weight is really important as props are picked up and carried while dancing, so they have to be super light, but strong. Upholstery can't be squishy and realistic as we'd make for opera, instead it has to be firm – polystyrene with a thin layer of foam – so that it can be hardy, as it will be danced on.'

Although they have never advertised their services, demand has grown through word of mouth within the industry – as the quality and versatility of the department is heralded by others. Recent projects include the refurbishment of *The Nutcracker* and *Romeo & Juliet* for BRB; furniture for *The House of Bernarda Alba* at the National Theatre; a new *The Nutcracker* for English National Ballet; and *My Neighbour Totoro* for RSC/Hathaway Productions (following two seasons at the Barbican it was rebuilt for a smaller venue at the Gillian Lynne Theatre in the West End).

'*My Neighbour Totoro* was a really interesting project for us as we had to create two buses that slide across the stage, operated by puppeteers. There was no room for them to be stored when they were coming on and off stage because they were just too big and too heavy, so we came up with a system of folding the bus in three, with hinges, which we created out of heavy duty cardboard – thus making a flexible and lightweight, albeit large, prop for a smaller theatre', says Paul. 'This type of work offers something different for us, different challenges. It keeps us in the network of makers nationally and helps us build our reputation, making us an attractive employer too because our work is so varied.' ●

↑ Glyndebourne's Production Hub is a great space for prop making

# BEYOND SUSSEX

Although we no longer go out on Tour, Glyndebourne is still very much on the move – to destinations as far apart as London and Sydney. **Mia Julyan** takes a look at our recent adventures beyond Sussex.

## London and an extra special Proms year

Each summer, our annual visit to the BBC Proms at London's Royal Albert Hall is a highlight – an exciting moment that sees us taking part in this iconic British cultural institution alongside other world-class orchestras, conductors and soloists. And this year was an extra special one. Not only did we present a concert performance of our new Festival 2025 production of *Le nozze di Figaro*, but soprano Louise Alder (our Countess) also starred in the grand finale of the Proms, wearing a spectacular dress made by our own talented costume team here at Glyndebourne. The beautiful bespoke gown was designed by Nicky Shaw – a long-time Glyndebourne collaborator who also designed the set and costumes for *The Railway Children* – and made by Glyndebourne's senior cutter Beryl Waldron and the team of in-house costume makers. This year's Proms appearances perfectly captured the essence of Glyndebourne: a unique combination of musical brilliance and creative craftsmanship.

## London autumn performances

As part of Autumn Season 2025, Glyndebourne was back in London with two concert performances. The first was at the Southbank Centre, the first time we've been back since we held Festival 1993 there while the new opera house was being built at Glyndebourne – with a staged concert performance of *The Railway Children* composed by Mark-Anthony Turnage – fresh from its world-premiere at Glyndebourne on 31 October.

On 5 December, we were back at the Royal Albert Hall with Handel's choral masterpiece *Messiah*, a fittingly epic piece to mark Glyndebourne's first ever performance there outside of the Proms. This one-off concert was also a milestone for the Glyndebourne Sinfonia, which performed in front of its largest audience to date in the mammoth 5,272-seat auditorium: a striking contrast to our own intimate theatre seating 1,250.



↑ Louise Alder backstage before Last Night at the Proms – in a dress designed by Nicky Shaw and made by Glyndebourne's costume department

## Cologne, Berlin and Copenhagen

After being staged at home, you might imagine that every new opera is packed away until it is revived again. This isn't always the case as many of our productions are hired out to other opera houses well beyond our Sussex borders. Each ruff, backdrop and prop is carefully packaged up and sent off to delight audiences around the world – from Paris to Perth.

Our much-loved production of *The Rake's Progress* wins the prize for the most hired production – a whopping 13 times. Other recent hires include *Hamlet* to the Sydney Opera House in December 2024 [following its run at the Met in New York in 2022], and following its success in Festival 2025, *Saul* went to Cologne in November 2025. This year will see *Giulio Cesare* head off to Deutsche Oper Berlin, while *Dialogues des Carmélites* and *Don Pasquale* are going to the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen. Keep an eye out for where our productions will be appearing next... ●

Mia is Glyndebourne's Marketing Officer

*This dress, and the making of it, will feature in a solo exhibition in the Archive Gallery during Festival 2026.*

Tosca • Il turco in Italia • L'Orfeo • Billy Budd • Ariadne auf Naxos • Die Entführung aus dem Serail

# FESTIVAL 2026

Friday 9 January  
Festival Society Members'  
ticket application deadline

Friday 30 January  
Associate Members'  
ticket application deadline

Sunday 22 February  
Under 40s online booking opens

Sunday 2 March  
Public booking opens online

21 MAY – 30 AUGUST

# PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE



Richard Hubert Smith

As the position of Glyndebourne's Autumn Season is cemented in the UK's annual opera calendar, it is fast becoming known as the home for emerging talent and new work. **Stephen Langridge** looks back on a successful season that saw the world premiere of Turnage's *The Railway Children*, and towards another new work, *Spark*, composed by Lucy Armstrong, which will premiere in 2026.

Our Autumn Season now has a real focus on what goes into the *making* of an opera. We show our workings: photographs of backstage team members in the foyer; videos of the set being built on the front-of-house screens; transparencies of the lighting rig on the glass doors either side of the Long Bar. The Jerwood Pit Perfect chamber music concerts were backstage and in-the-round, allowing audience members to meet the young players and to experience the reality of a working rehearsal room.

Glyndebourne's commitment to promoting new talent continues, with younger up-and-coming artists on stage. Those artists get the opportunity to develop, try new roles, while the audience can enjoy spotting the stars of tomorrow – it's well worth keeping the programme for future boasting 'of course, I remember seeing them one autumn at Glyndebourne before they worked at La Scala'. There is now a real pathway at Glyndebourne. There were several singers in the Chorus last year who started out as members of Glyndebourne Youth Opera, as well as a principal singer, Darwin Prakash, who started off in our talent development programme, Glyndebourne Academy.

As well as the sell-out performances of operas and concerts, there is always a huge engagement with young people – several thousand saw a performance or took part in creative projects: as part of our Singing Schools Network performances; seeing a full performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Railway Children* with their school; or they might have been performing in a mainstage opera production – as chorus in *La bohème* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; or singing in a Christmas Concert.

Through our year-round Learning & Engagement programme we are also working with communities in Hastings and Crawley. Last year Singing Schools included around 320 children, alongside members of the Glyndebourne Chorus and the Glyndebourne Sinfonia. Performances included music written by the children, with sections of Handel's *Messiah*, all sewn together by composer Howard Moody.

↑ Henna Mun (Phyllis), Jessica Cale (Bobbie) and Matthew McKinney (Peter) in the world premiere of *The Railway Children*, Autumn Season 2025

We were thrilled to present the world premiere of a new chamber opera, *The Railway Children* by composer Mark-Anthony Turnage with librettist Rachael Hewer – our second world premiere in 2025 (the first being Jonathan Dove's *Uprising*). Turnage's *The Railway Children* is inspired by Edith Nesbit's well-known novel of the same name, but with a modern twist. It's a perfect example of what we are trying to do in our Autumn Season: a new opera, suitable for family audiences; all the singers began in the Glyndebourne Chorus; the creative team was resolutely homegrown Glyndebourne; and it was the first opera for the several thousand young people who come to the schools' performances. Maybe it will inspire young people to get involved in Glyndebourne Youth Opera as a performer, or to think about a career as a composer, designer, director, or props maker, stage manager, tailor... after all it's not all about singing: opera is where all the arts come together, and there's a lot more going on than the audience sees.

Our Learning & Engagement team visited 31 schools, reaching over 4,000 pupils with members of the Chorus throughout November 2025 in preparation for One Voice, a singing festival for school children. A collaboration with Create Music, One Voice took place at Glyndebourne in early December – with five performances, each

starring around 160 children on stage, singing with the Glyndebourne Chorus and Sinfonia – a joyous musical riot! Performances also took place at Brighton Dome's Concert Hall and the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill; a staggering 2,800 young people from Sussex performed across the three venues.

We rounded off the year with performances of Handel's *Messiah* (which we also performed at The Royal Albert Hall) and our Christmas Concerts – which have become for many people an annual event kicking off their Yuletide festivities.

In Autumn 2026 another world premiere comes to the stage – a newly commissioned youth opera. Written by Balancing the Score composer, Lucy Armstrong and librettist Olivia Bell, *Spark* stars Glyndebourne Youth Opera as soloists and chorus, alongside a sprinkling of Glyndebourne principal singers. This tale of loss, friendship and keeping the spark of imagination alive is suitable for a family audience and continues Glyndebourne's decades-long commitment to making work with and for young people. ●

Stephen Langridge is Glyndebourne's Artistic Director

↓ Backstage shot of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Autumn Season 2025





Richard Hubert Smith

# NEW OPERA

By Alexandra Coghlan

Contemporary opera is having a moment. Perhaps it's an illusion created by the ongoing impact of the Covid-backlog, but it's increasingly looking like a real, rejuvenated hunger for new encounters and sensations after the silence of lockdowns around the world. The opera scene has rarely felt livelier or more up for grabs.

The Met started the wave in 2021, putting contemporary works front and centre for the first time. Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up In My Bones* wasn't just an unexpected house-reopener, it was a statement of intent: defining a new post-Covid era of opera with fresher, more diverse voices. Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* and Brett Dean's *Hamlet* – premiered at Glyndebourne – followed closely behind, and subsequent seasons have continued the trend. In 2025 we saw the premiere of John Adams' *Antony and Cleopatra*, a major new commission from Grammy-winner Mason Bates – *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* – as well as a run of Kaiaja Saariaho's *Innocence* in Simon Stone's powerful staging – already seen in Aix and London's Royal Ballet and Opera (RBO).

It's a similar story in Europe. 2025 was a rich year with major premieres from Unsuk Chin (*Dark Side of the Moon*, Hamburg), Ireland's Gerald Barry (*Salome*, premiered at Opera Magdeburg and swiftly after in LA), Rebecca Saunders' first opera *Lash* (Deutsche Oper Berlin) and Francisco Coll's Ibsen-adaptation *Enemy of the People* in Madrid in autumn 2025. And there's more on the

way – forthcoming highlights include Matthias Pintscher's *The Cold Heart* in both Berlin and Paris early 2026.

Despite restrictions imposed by Brexit and an increasingly challenging funding climate, the UK is punching well above its weight when it comes to new opera – both staging and composing. In November 2025 Jonathan Dove and April De Angelis won an Ivors Classical Award for *Uprising*, which premiered at Glyndebourne last February. *The Railway Children* is part of a rich resurgence of interest in new work, arriving at Glyndebourne fresh from Mark-Anthony Turnage's five-star smash *Festen*, premiered at RBO and heading to Helsinki in a future season. George Benjamin continues his successful run with stagings of his 2023 *Picture A Day Like This*, while Thomas Adès' Buñuel-inspired *The Exterminating Angel* (2017) has already travelled to the Met and, in 2024, to Paris.

While new operatic voices aren't limited to young composers – veteran Colin Matthews premiered his first opera *A Visit To Friends* to acclaim at the Aldeburgh Festival in 2025, aged 79 – there are plenty of green shoots too in this most challenging of art forms to break into. Premiered in 2022, Oliver Leith's trippy, witty *Last Days* was back for a second run at the Linbury Theatre in autumn 2025, while Tom Coulter's 2022 *Violet* (another Aldeburgh premiere) announced the arrival of an exciting new voice. ●

Alexandra is Glyndebourne's Opera Specialist

# HOME GROWN TALENT

**Ashley Beauchamp** was assistant conductor for Mark-Anthony Turnage's *The Railway Children* in autumn 2025 and this year will conduct the world premiere of *Spark*, Glyndebourne's next new opera. **Alexandra Coghlan** caught up with him.

**Your relationship with Glyndebourne has been an ever-evolving one...**

Yes, I first encountered Glyndebourne in 2010 as a local 16-year-old, playing the flute/piccolo in the community opera *Knight Crew*. This was a hugely transformative experience, and one that introduced me to opera – something I'd not been exposed to growing up.

My professional relationship began in 2012, when I worked as a répétiteur for Glyndebourne Youth Opera while on my gap-year before music college. I subsequently worked on the Glyndebourne Tour and now the Festival. It's a lovely 'full-circle' moment in that I am now the Music Director for the Glyndebourne Youth Opera.

**What is particularly exciting about working on youth or community projects?**

I've yet to find a better way to give people a life-long love of opera than by inviting them to learn, stage and perform it. It completely immerses people in the art form, and gives them a much deeper understanding of what it is and, crucially, why it is relevant. My approach is very similar, whether I am working with a total amateur or world-class professional singer. The goal is always to provide a safe and enjoyable space in which to work at the very highest level possible.

**You've previously assisted on *La traviata*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. What exactly does an assistant conductor do?**

The role of an assistant conductor is to help the conductor to facilitate their musical version of the piece. Alongside the obvious – being ready to conduct at any point in the process – you also need to be a second pair of eyes and ears for the conductor: keeping an eye on things in the rehearsal room, taking balance notes in the auditorium. I have been lucky to work alongside so many of the best at Glyndebourne.

↖ *The Railway Children*

↗ Ashley Beauchamp in rehearsals for *Uprising* with soprano Ffion Edwards

Richard Hubert Smith



**Favourite Glyndebourne memory?**

So many! Getting to conduct in the pit here for the first time to hearing our 120-strong amateur chorus singing on the main stage in *Uprising* after seven months of rehearsal. There was also the time I had the entire Glyndebourne Chorus sing 'Happy Birthday' to me on the stage – I'll not forget that in a hurry!

**Top recommendation for anyone coming to Glyndebourne as an audience member?**

Get down to the far end of the lake. I'll often be found going for a walk down there before rehearsals. You can't beat that view.

**Any pre-show rituals or routines?**

Diet Coke and a banana.

**Any highlights coming up?**

I'm looking forward to a busy 2026 recording an album with flautist Stephen Clark, conducting a world premiere for Jersey Opera House and returning to Garsington Opera. Most excitingly though, I am conducting the world premiere of *Spark* on the main stage here at Glyndebourne in November 2026 – a brilliant new opera composed by Lucy Armstrong and written by Olivia Bell. I can't wait! ●

# THE TIE THAT BINDS

Glyndebourne's heartbeat. Glyndebourne's core: membership is central to everything Glyndebourne does or aspires to do. Members are vital. **Richard Davidson-Houston** thanks you for your commitment, your commendation and your community.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1951, Glyndebourne launched Festival Society membership – a decision that would shape its future. The idea was simple but bold: invite people not just to attend, but to share in the responsibility for fulfilling the company's mission.

It worked. What began as a small group became a large and enduring community. Today, Glyndebourne has more members than at any point in its history. The scale has changed, but the purpose remains the same – to give opera at Glyndebourne a secure future, and to support but also to hold whomever is in charge to account.

At its core, membership expresses a simple truth: Glyndebourne will continue so long as enough people care that it should.

The impact of your membership is felt everywhere. It gives Glyndebourne its heartbeat – not just through the subscription, but through attendance, and in sharing in the spirit of this place. That steady presence is what makes everything else possible: the confidence to plan ahead, to take creative risks and to sustain the craft and care behind every performance. Membership creates a dependable rhythm – one that keeps artists working, ideas flowing and opera alive at Glyndebourne. Its value lies as much in emotional allegiance as in financial support: a shared belief that *this* matters, and that it should endure. This, I think, is why people often talk about feeling 'part of a family'.

This 75th anniversary is a moment to thank you – and to recognise that everything we achieve is built on your commitment, the commitment of





those who came before you, and of those yet to come. A commitment that must not and will not be taken for granted.

The arts are under pressure. Costs rise faster than we can control; for you and for us. We all have more demands on our time. Competition for attention is relentless. None of this is unique to Glyndebourne, but it makes the constancy of membership all the more valuable. It is the part of our business model that sustains, as demonstrated through the awful Covid years.

We know that many members make sacrifices to be part of this community – and we don't take that lightly. Last year, we undertook a major piece of research to understand what membership means to you; what you most need and most value. Thousands of you took part, and we're deeply grateful. Your insights will help us strengthen what makes being a Glyndebourne member special.

Like the water in the lake, our membership flows, replenishes and so remains the same.

What will the next 75 years bring? New work, new voices and new opera. New challenges and new opportunities. New members. The flow will continue. With your ongoing support and fellowship we can keep Glyndebourne alert to possibility – ready to reflect and to adapt.

Thank you for your commitment. Renew when the time comes. Invite friends and family to discover Glyndebourne for themselves. The more of us there are, the stronger we will become.

Seventy-five years from now, someone else will be marvelling at the 150th anniversary of Glyndebourne membership. The future begins, as it always has, with you. ●

← Participants at the 'Members' Open Day: Voice' event on 8 November 2025

↑ Members on stage talking with our technical staff during the 'Members' Open Day: Stage' event on 15 November 2025

# THE NEXT GENERATION



Glyndebourne has always believed in making, performing and sharing opera of the highest quality, and since 1986 the organisation has pioneered work through its award-winning Learning & Engagement (L&E) programme. This has included myriad projects with a huge range of people from world-class artists to people with dementia and their carers, prisoners, young offenders, school communities and venues around the Glyndebourne Tour. Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2026, Glyndebourne's L&E department is taking the opportunity to focus its energy on work with young people as **Lucy Perry** explains.

Opera gives us all a place to explore and express our emotions, dreams and ideas, through a collective experience of telling stories through music. This is true no matter your background or previous experiences.

At this moment in time, this is more important than ever. The world is changing around us. Old habits and ideas are being questioned and challenged, new technology has changed how we communicate with each other, and the world of empathetic conversation and debate seems far away. The creative industries are grappling with the opportunities and threats presented by AI and working cultures are almost unrecognisable from a few short years ago.

We also know that although 'everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts... and its benefits'<sup>1</sup> large sections of our society rarely have the opportunity or resources to exercise that right. Access to arts and culture is shrinking for young people. Evidence shows that after-school arts activities are accessed far less by students eligible for free school meals; that young adults from



Pablo Strong



working-class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle class peers; that a family's socioeconomic status and where a child grows up has a significant impact on whether or not they will pursue Expressive Arts options at school from the age of 14. On top of that, there is also a crisis in arts teacher recruitment – since 2020/2021 there has been a dramatic fall in the number of people applying to be teachers in Music (76% drop), Drama (60%) and Design & Technology (45%)<sup>1</sup>.

So, what does this mean for Glyndebourne? We can't afford simply to hope that new generations will discover this art form as they might have done previously, and that homegrown talent will appear. We know that young people will play a vital role in driving the future direction of the art form, on- and off-stage, so we need to understand the perspective of young people growing up today: what do they think about the operas we are presenting? Who gets to create new work? How can we support personal development through opera? How can we inform and support career choices at key moments?

Through the L&E programme our ambition is that opera experiences become part of the culture of what it means to grow up in Sussex, and that nationally Glyndebourne continues to be seen as a beacon of support for the next generation of opera makers – currently there is a focus on pathways for singers. All activity is designed so that it is easy to access, and provides a welcoming and inclusive experience. Crucially, we can't achieve this on our own, and open, collaborative partnership working is key. Sharing ideas and resources means we can conceive and design work together that meets real and identifiable needs for young people. Locally, we are particularly proud of our partnership with the Sussex Music Hub (Create Music in partnership with West Sussex Music) which delivers music education and opportunities to every child and school in Sussex. ▶

1 Article 27, Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
 2 Cultural Learning Alliance Report Card 2025

↖ GYO in *Uprising*, February 2025  
 ↑ GYO workshop, August 2025  
 ↗ *La bohème*, Autumn Season 2025 featuring GYO



The programme is split into three areas:

#### **Schools**

Glyndebourne brings world-class opera to thousands of children annually. Activity aims to ensure that every child, regardless of background, can access the transformative power of live opera and participatory arts. Over 8,000 children participate annually from more than 150 schools, particularly those with limited arts provision, fostering creativity, confidence, teamwork and communication skills. Teachers are empowered to strengthen music education through training. Travel grants ensure cost is not a barrier to participation for high-need state schools.

The activity is delivered as part of Glyndebourne's Autumn Season: (1) live fully-staged performances for schools at Glyndebourne; (2) the One Voice Festival of Singing (in partnership with Create Music), where primary pupils perform with the Glyndebourne Chorus and Sinfonia; (3) the Singing Schools Network, a project for targeted state primary, secondary and special educational needs (SEN) schools, in which young people co-create their own songs (with composer Howard Moody) and Glyndebourne choristers.

#### **Glyndebourne Youth Opera**

Glyndebourne Youth Opera (GYO) offers local young people (aged 9-19) world-class performance opportunities and engaging opera workshops. Activities range from skills workshops across Sussex, to auditioned performance opportunities in the Glyndebourne Festival and Autumn Season. In 2026, new commission *Spark* by composer Lucy Armstrong and librettist Olivia Bell will be performed as part of the Autumn Season, conducted by GYO Music Director, Ashley Beauchamp (see page 13). While historically focused on singing, we are also exploring the possibility of running a technical youth opera programme.



## National vocal talent

Glyndebourne Academy is an annual, free programme for 18-26 year-old singers in the British Isles who have faced challenges in their musical development (eg personal, geographical or financial). Activity includes intensive training (vocal, movement, language) and mentorship led by Glyndebourne's Vocal Consultant Mary King. Alumni regularly succeed in conservatoire applications, and past participants now perform in the Chorus and as soloists at Glyndebourne and beyond.

We also support 14-19 year olds interested in singing through workshops delivered in partnership with Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, The Hallé, Bromley Boys Singers, Opera North and Welsh National Opera. A four-day residential enables participants to experience opera at Glyndebourne, meet artists, and receive specialised vocal, movement and language training.

For us, creating a safe environment for young people to explore their emotions, develop skills, learn how to express themselves through opera, and crucially think about the world from multiple perspectives seems more important than ever. In return, their insight, energy, optimism and sheer hard work inspires us daily, as we have conversations about how we adapt and grow our industry. As we look ahead to 2034 and Glyndebourne's centenary, today's young people will play an important part in ensuring we have another 100 years of opera at Glyndebourne. ●

Lucy is Glyndebourne's Head of Learning & Engagement

↖ Performance for Schools audience, Autumn Season 2025

↑ GYO in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Autumn Season 2025

↗ Spark workshop, spring 2025

# SUPPORTING THE NEW

**Christopher** and **Sarah Smith** are production supporters – to date they have supported *The Wreckers* and *Parsifal*. They talked to **Karen Anderson** about their philanthropic approach and why opera is important to them.



↑ Christopher and Sarah Smith at the opening night of *Parsifal*, Festival 2025

→ Kristina Staneck (Kundry) in *Parsifal*, Festival 2025

Support from individual donors, as sole supporters or as part of a group (syndicates or circles), helps Glyndebourne stage its opera productions every year – new work as well as revivals – in the Festival or Autumn Season.

For Christopher and Sarah Smith bringing new work to the stage is important, and is why they supported *The Wreckers* in 2022 and *Parsifal* in 2025. Christopher notes 'All opera houses rely on a combination of old and new productions, but audiences will dwindle without a steady flow of new productions. So, for us, supporting new productions is a vital element in ensuring the future of an opera company.'

Sarah concurs, adding that the appeal of certain operas, those that have not been staged at Glyndebourne before, are of particular interest to them. '*The Wreckers* appealed to us because it was something quite novel. It had not been performed for many years, was written by a woman – English composer Ethel Smyth – and was a first for Glyndebourne,' she says. 'The opera, set in Cornwall where we have family connections, has a great plot bringing out the acute tensions in a village community facing real hardship. *Parsifal* was different – it had been on the 'to do' list at Glyndebourne from the earliest days of the Festival.' Keen Wagnerians, they wanted to support its first staging. 'The production last summer demonstrated, quite clearly, that Glyndebourne can put on a very demanding Wagner opera with the same degree of professionalism as they do with works by Mozart or Handel, whose operas are more traditionally associated with the Festival,' Christopher says. 'And if we like an opera, or the style of the director and his/her approach to a new production, we are open to supporting its staging.'

The Smiths find the standard of opera at Glyndebourne particularly appealing, as Sarah explains: 'Opera is a demanding art form and only works if performed to a very high standard. Glyndebourne, from its earliest days, has attached

*If you would like a conversation about philanthropy and supporting Glyndebourne please contact Helen McCarthy [helenmccarthy@glyndebourne.com](mailto:helenmccarthy@glyndebourne.com)*

great importance to enough rehearsal time and the highest artistic standards. This, in our view, is the reason why Glyndebourne enjoys such a high reputation – not only from audiences but also, and very importantly, from members of the cast and production team whom we have met during rehearsals or following performances.'

Their philanthropic approach is driven by a love of the arts but also out of necessity. 'The UK has a great performing arts sector – in music, theatre, ballet and opera' says Christopher. 'But suffers from chronic underfunding which, in the current economic climate, is likely to continue. One characteristic that appeals to us about Glyndebourne is the lack of state-sponsored funding for the Festival. Not having to rely on state funding is a big advantage and means that strategic decisions can be made without reference to the whims of a public sector organisation. We particularly enjoy sponsoring productions at Glyndebourne because we feel we can be more involved with the opera as it is being produced. We can attend rehearsals, and enjoy watching the interaction between the conductor and the director, meeting the cast and the musical and production staff. Listening to their insights is really interesting.'

Christopher and Sarah also support the Royal Ballet and Opera, the Royal Academy, National Theatre and the Royal Academy of Dance – and opera, particularly at Glyndebourne, is close to their hearts. 'Opera brings together music, drama, staging and costume design,' says Sarah. 'It is best experienced live – for us cinema performances rarely convey the intensity of a live performance. Opera houses are often wonderful buildings in their own right, which makes them a pleasure to visit – and, of course, at Glyndebourne the setting is unique.'

Christopher and Sarah have been attending Glyndebourne since 1980 and have been members for over 20 years. Their favourite operas include the 2003 production of *Tristan und Isolde*, Graham Vick's *Eugene Onegin* and Michael Grandage's *Billy Budd* 'which we really look forward to seeing again this summer,' Sarah notes. And looking further to the future and what they'd like to see: 'the famous double bill of two one-act operas *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci* is a great favourite for us, and hasn't as we understand, been performed at Glyndebourne before', she adds. ●

Karen is Glyndebourne's Head of Content





# THE JOY IN DRESSING UP

By Jade Baidow-Fletcher



Historically, some opera-goers went 'to see and be seen'. We spent summer 2025 spotting the Festival fashions. From sunset shades of pink and red to head-to-toe orange sequins, white tuxedos to velvet dinner jackets, adding flair to formal wear is what our audiences do best.

Fashion is more than just clothes, though. It's sharing sartorial styling tips at the Long Bar and compliment exchanges by the Ha-Ha. A trip to the opera permits you to dust off the gladrags and dress to impress.

Because, if you can't dress up to go to Glyndebourne, when can you? ●

Jade is Glyndebourne's Social Media & Online Content Manager

# STAGING OUR FIRST TOSCA

It's a rare gift today to be able to stage one of the top five most-performed operas for the very first time – and yet here we are. **Alexandra Coghlan** talks to **Stephen Langridge** about commissioning Glyndebourne's first *Tosca* for Festival 2026.

When Puccini's defiant diva *Tosca* first leapt from Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo in January 1900 she took opera with her – diving headlong into a new century and a new kind of theatre.

*Tosca* electrified audiences and appalled critics for exactly the same reason. Musicologist Joseph Kerman infamously dismissed the opera as a 'shabby little shocker', finding its brutality and melodrama vulgar, while critic Bernard Williams called it 'distinctly nasty'. But audiences immediately embraced a political thriller in music, all dramatic immediacy and intense emotion – a story painted in black, white and blood. A shocker, certainly, but nothing shabby about it.

'In this *Tosca* I see the opera that I need: one without excessive proportions or a decorative spectacle; nor is it the kind that calls for a superabundance of music.' Puccini's reaction to the play that inspired his opera is telling. The composer wasn't interested in 'spectacle' or even music for its own sake. He wanted a lean, potent story he could treat not as a 19th-century Grand Opera, but a taut modern one: pure theatre in sound.

Today a staple of opera houses globally, with a safe spot in the top five most-performed operas every year, *Tosca* has only gained appeal. You can see it almost anywhere – anywhere, that is, except Glyndebourne. Until now.

2026 marks the first ever Festival staging – nearly 100 years after Glyndebourne's first ever season. It was, as Artistic Director Stephen Langridge explains, an unexpected gift.

'How did I feel when I found out we'd never done a *Tosca* before?' He grins. 'Absolutely delighted! It's a treat, isn't it, to be able to stage the first one?'

Firsts are a bit of a theme with this *Tosca* – new not just to Glyndebourne itself, but to director Ted Huffman, as well as Music Director Robin Ticciati, conducting Puccini for the first time professionally. Ticciati will conduct the first run while Jordan de Souza will conduct the August performances. It's an unprecedented opportunity to bring new eyes and ears to a story that has to feel fresh-minted, high-stakes, with each performance.

'The beautiful, wonderful music carries you away,' Langridge explains, 'but it's not the most comfortable of pieces to come face to face with. It takes you to places of extreme violence and resistance, which are worth thinking about – however difficult or confronting that is.'

A plot Langridge describes as 'a love-story between artists in the time of political repression' pivots on a love-triangle between singer Floria Tosca, her artist-revolutionary lover Mario Cavaradossi, and Baron Scarpia, the corrupt Chief of Police, unafraid to use his public power to fulfil his private desires. It's this tight emotional and psychological web that'll be the key, Langridge believes, to Glyndebourne's new staging.

'You have to ask two questions of any piece: one is what we can bring to the audience. The other is how we can reveal a piece differently, in a way that's particular to us? At Glyndebourne we work very much as an ensemble with a long rehearsal period, which is not always the case with this particular opera, where singers are often flown in at the last minute to do their thing. That can be very exciting, very grand, with massive stages and huge scenery, but our *Tosca* can have a more intimate environment, one where we can really explore nuance of character and communication.'



Character is at the centre of Huffman's work – a fluid, emotionally direct music-theatre that has already impressed UK audiences in Philip Venables' collaborations *Denis & Katya* [Newport, Aberystwyth Arts Centre and the Southbank Centre] and *4.48 Psychosis* [Royal Court Theatre and The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon], as well as a tender *Eugene Onegin* for the Royal Ballet and Opera.

Newly appointed General Director at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, Huffman is 'an extraordinary talent,' says Langridge. 'I like that he's really delving into people. There's not a lot of embellishment in what he does; we're plunged into the heart of things and there's a lot of humanity in his work; even when you're dealing with hideous situations or acts, we still care about the people.'

*Tosca* has a particular personal significance for Huffman who, as a child, sang the role of the Shepherd Boy at New York's Metropolitan Opera – getting an early taste of an art form that would never lose its grip on him. 'I think Ted will bring something new to *Tosca*... what he really pays attention to are the people,' Langridge adds.

Bringing *Tosca* to life this summer are two different sopranos. American Caitlin Gotimer will be making both her UK and Glyndebourne debuts: 'I know she is a rising star in this role, having sung it at Arizona Opera and Santa Fe Opera, and is a singer we are really looking forward to working with, she has great dramatic intensity,' says Langridge. Welsh soprano Natalya Romaniw is a familiar face and voice. 'She's a phenomenal artist,' says Langridge. 'She is an actor, singer and musician all in one package – and that's not always true of people singing roles at this level. There's also something very open about her work, she goes into those vulnerable places.'

Originally set in 1800 – just after the end of the French Revolution, in a Rome under threat of Napoleonic invasion – *Tosca* arrives charged with political themes: the use and abuse of power, the relationships between art and politics; the duty of the artist within an oppressive regime. It all feels pointedly topical. 'Sadly I suspect it's always relevant,' Langridge says. 'If you had asked anyone in my position since 1900 they would probably say the same thing. I can't claim it as more so right now, but I think that is part of its appeal for audiences.'

If political relevance is part of the equation, what makes up the sum of *Tosca*'s enduring appeal? 'The first thing I think of when you ask that question are those opening chords,' Langridge laughs. 'Fasten your safety belts – we're off! Of course the themes are big and weighty but it's an opera written like a thriller and there's delight in that: a rip-roaring theatrical bungee-jump.'

'We can discuss *Tosca* in an intellectual way, in a political way, but when you're sitting in the theatre it just grabs you by the scruff of the neck. It's a completely raw, open, passionate experience, and that's irresistible. It's the first great masterpiece of the 20th century.' ●

With *Tosca* Robin Ticciati will be conducting Puccini for the first time

↑ Ted Huffman will make his mainstage debut with *Tosca*. Previously he directed and co-created *Macbeth*, a short chamber opera, with composer-in-residence Luke Styles for Glyndebourne in 2015. It was also performed at the Linbury Theatre, London

# A TALE OF TWO TOSCAS

With two performance runs, Festival 2026's *Tosca* features two different casts, two different conductors and two different Toscas. So what can we expect from the opera's very different leading ladies? **Alexandra Coghlan** finds out.

Rising-star American soprano **Caitlin Gotimer** (May and June performances) makes both her UK and Glyndebourne debuts this summer. A finalist in 2023's Operalia competition, she has since made debuts at opera companies across the US, including Aspen, Dayton and Pittsburgh – where she was a resident artist. Her role debut as the Countess in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at Aspen was hailed as 'a triumph', while her *Tosca* with Arizona Opera was praised for its 'grace and depth'. The latter role is rapidly becoming a signature for the young singer, who admits she shares the character's 'feisty, passionate and loyal' traits.

Gotimer made her European debut in 2024 at Berlin's Deutsche Oper as La Madre in Respighi's *La Flamma*, and later this season will make her house debut at the Royal Danish Opera as Nedda in *Pagliacci*.

Ukrainian-Welsh soprano **Natalya Romaniw** (August performances) will be a familiar face – and voice – to UK opera-goers, having built her career on British and Welsh stages. Most recently she's had a busy season at the Royal Ballet and Opera, making her role debut as Sieglinde in the Ring Cycle, creating the role of Helena in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen* as well as singing the title role in the company's *Tosca* – praised for her 'subtle delicacy and depth of colouring' as well as her 'exceptional tonal beauty'.

Natalya has also worked extensively with Welsh National Opera (returning there this season for Puccini's *Il trittico*) and English National Opera, and after a critically-acclaimed performance of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at the BBC Proms, she sang the title role in December 2025 at La Scala under Riccardo Chailly. ●



Marika Photography



Frances Marshall

↑↑ Caitlin Gotimer  
↑ Natalya Romaniw

# MASTER STORYTELLER

Over the past 25 years **David McVicar** has created five new productions (and many revivals) for Glyndebourne. Each is exquisite in its sumptuous detail and dramatic flair. **Karen Anderson** looks back with him on the work he's created.

There is nothing predictable about a David McVicar opera. They are very different, but there is something similar in them too that marks them out. For me it is their humanity and depth of characterisation and storytelling that makes them feel real, compelling and memorable – so much so that I can easily see Cleopatra, Hans Sachs or Konstanze in my mind's eye years after I saw them on stage.

McVicar's power in creating iconic characters starts in rehearsals. 'I don't arrive with everything planned and written down,' he says. 'But I do arrive with a very firm idea of the direction I want to go in. I'd like to compare it to an early explorer knowing where America is but not quite knowing where America is. But I've got a rough map of how to get there, and then everyone else is going to chip in and help us to get to landfall.'

'I think one of the real skills in creating a show is getting to know and understand the performers that are in the room with you, and getting to feel what their needs are, achieving equilibrium about what they want and what they need. For me, getting the cast right is essential. Finding a performer who is already bringing, in terms of their personality or their physicality, a lot of what I am imagining that character might be about is essential and it is one of the reasons I try to be really involved in casting, in whatever theatre I'm working in. Some theatres present you with the cast, but at Glyndebourne it's a very different thing because there's always a dialogue. When we did *Meistersinger* for the first time, it was one of the longest casting processes I've ever been through because the cast is so huge. Every single person in that cast was looked at this way, that way. And with the casting of the Meisters themselves, nothing was a given. There was an argument, a counterargument, then eventually agreement for every character, and we ended up with a really super cast.'

David McVicar looks back on the five operas he's created for Glyndebourne:



← Alfie Boe (Rodolfo) and Simona Todaro (Mimi) in the Tour 2000 production of *La bohème*

Mike Hoban

## LA BOHÈME (Tour 2000)

Revived: Festival 2003, Tour 2004, Tour 2011, Festival 2012

'I remember we had a lot of fun. I remember that we were all sort of the same age, in our late 20s, early 30s. The whole cast, all of us. The budget wasn't very big because it was created to go out on the Tour, and I believe at that stage it wasn't intended to go into the Festival, although it did later as it was successful. It is not the way I'd do *Bohème* now, but it was how I wanted to do it then. It was the right piece at the right time. I loved doing it.' ▶



Robert Workman

## CARMEN (2002)

Revived: Tour 2002, Festival 2004, Festival & Tour 2008, Festival 2015

'It is quite difficult to stage *Carmen* – the thing you have to understand is that it is very funny. Until the middle of Act II, when José sings the flower song, there's no hint that this is going to be anything other than a light-hearted, sexy story. *Carmen* is very, very funny. If you can't recognise that humour is one of her strongest traits, you get it wrong. She doesn't try to be sexy. She is strong, funny and independent. She is "I don't give a damn!"'

'When Carmen first comes on stage in most productions, even the edgier ones, she's sort of sloping around, pouting at the men. And I didn't see that in the character. I saw a woman who comes on stage and says "Whatever! All you men looking at me – am I bothered?" In fact she's so not bothered that, contrarily, she says "I'm going to choose that nerdy little guy over there, that's who I want." She doesn't realise she's made the biggest mistake of her life, because that nerdy guy has serious psychological problems. The genius of *Carmen* is halfway through; it turns into a terrifying examination of a dysfunctional

relationship. A relationship that is about control, about violence – but there's no hint of that until the middle of the second act, and that's the power of this opera because it moves from being a comedy into being the deepest, darkest, most unsettling tragedy. But you've got to recognise the comedic aspects of *Carmen* otherwise it doesn't function. It can't be doom and gloom from the outset otherwise you're not getting it right, and you're not listening to the music.'

'The score is just sensational. I got some flak online, because when we created it I said it's almost like the first musical that was ever written. What I meant by saying that was that it is just hit number after hit number. It's like *West Side Story*. Every number is good; there's no slack in *Carmen*. There's nothing you want to cut in *Carmen*. Everything is composed with such skill and such drive. And yet weirdly, it's actually a very difficult opera to get right. You would think it would play itself, like *Traviata* almost plays itself, but *Carmen* is extremely hard to balance correctly and to get right.'



## GIULIO CESARE (2005)

Revived: Festivals 2006, 2009, 2018, 2024

*'Giulio Cesare. It is the best thing I've ever done, anywhere!*

*'Giulio Cesare was and is very special. The way it was created was special. It was my idea to do it – I was lucky in that Glyndebourne gave me the leverage to do something I wanted to do, to cast it the way I wanted; to work with a wonderful original conductor, William Christie and we're still doing it. Glyndebourne is still staging it. I'm going to be directing it in Berlin next year. I've never let anyone else direct that show, no assistant or revival director. It's a kind of mantra for me. If you want *Giulio Cesare* I've got to be there, Andrew [George, choreographer] must be there. It's our baby, we look after it. And I think that's why it always comes up scrubbed nicely! We really take care of that show. As long as it's live, I think we always will.'*

*Giulio Cesare* famously launched Danielle de Niese's career at Glyndebourne. As she was such a captivatingly strong Cleopatra, I ask how he remembers it: 'Danni's participation drove the production to the extremes of physicality, especially with the choreography. It was simply me and Andrew responding to the presence of Danni. She contributed a great deal to the vision of that production. And we've had some outstanding women since who have all been up to the mark and it's amazing how many great castings we've had.' ▶

↑ Danielle de Niese made her Glyndebourne debut as Cleopatra in 2005

↖ Stéphanie d'Oustrac in the title role in *Carmen*, Festival 2018



## DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG (2011)

Revived: Festival 2016

'I don't think I was Glyndebourne's first choice to direct this opera, but I think I accepted the commission knowing that because it was a challenge to me – and I say that because I don't know how good I am at Wagner, even though I've directed quite a lot of Wagner. I find the political aspects inescapable; it's baked into the text and music. My take on *Meistersinger* was that I wanted to talk about the Germany Wagner was born into, not the Germany that came after Wagner's death or that was already solidifying at the end of his lifetime.'

'I wanted to talk about community and humanity and how important the arts are to everyone's everyday, normal life. I wanted to make it genuinely funny, and I also wanted to tell a story about tragedy and loss and the arc of human experience. You can't encapsulate every single aspect of Wagner into one single production, it's impossible.'

'I think maybe *Meistersinger* is the most congenial of all Wagner's operas to my sensibilities, to what I'm good at putting on stage, to what I believe in, because it speaks about community and it speaks about love and it speaks about age and loss. And it's cheeky and naughty as well.'

'I think the production succeeded because I paid attention to the darker political strains of the piece, which is why I kept Beckmesser on stage until the very end, because the audience had to feel his pain, they had to feel his rejection and be sympathetic towards him. I was blessed with both of my Beckmessers [Johannes Martin Kranzle in 2011, Jochen Kupfer in 2016]. They were both extraordinary performers. But I think more than anything else, we tapped into the humanity of that opera, which redeems it. The cast were spectacular; the Chorus were just incredible. Especially the Apprentices – the Lehrbuben – because of the make-up of the Glyndebourne Chorus with so many young singers, we could really make the Lehrbuben work in a way you don't normally see. They were a bunch of mischievous, naughty young guys and gals – they were funny and badly behaved! And Gerry [Finlay] really did make those shoes! I've worked on the opera elsewhere and one singer was offended that he was expected to make the shoes – but not Gerry, he was a brilliant Hans Sachs and he made those shoes every night!'

## FOCUS ON: ANTHONY LEÓN

By Mia Julyan



Andrés Maldonado

This summer the American-born Cuban-Columbian tenor Anthony León will be performing at Glyndebourne for the first time, singing Belmonte – the young heroic Spaniard trying to rescue his kidnapped fiancée – in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. 'I am genuinely so excited to be making my debut at Glyndebourne,' he says. 'It has such a rich history and it continues to be one of the top festivals in the world.'

Since graduating from the New England Conservatory of Music in 2021, León won first prize at the 2022 Operalia competition and the Metropolitan Opera Laffont competition in 2023. He has also sung at the Met, LA Opera, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Santa Fe Opera, Carnegie Hall, Théâtre des Champs-Elysées and more.

Growing up in a musical household, León started singing aged two, before picking up piano and saxophone at three. Perhaps always destined for a career in music, he did consider becoming a doctor, pursuing vocal performance alongside pre-med studies at university. Luckily for us, after his first year he dropped his medical studies to study singing full time.

He made his role debut as Belmonte in 2024 at Teatro Regio in Turin. 'It was a very challenging role to learn, but incredibly rewarding to perform', he says. And it was the message within the opera 'that the people who are different from you, those you disagree with, turn out to be more human than you might think... love and kindness save the day. To me, there could not be a more relevant and moving truth.'



## DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL (Festival 2015)

Revived: Tour 2015, **Festival 2026**

'There's a general perception that Mozart's *Entführung* is like a comic fantasy. With this production I wanted to say no, this comes out of a period of history where the Ottoman Empire was almost at the gates of Vienna – a real geopolitical situation – which is very similar to the geopolitics of our time. I wanted to say, yes, it's a comedy. Yes, it's a romance. But this is also about something incredibly serious. This is about a collision of culture. It's about presuppositions, which each culture has about the other. Once you examine that and make that the foundation of what you want to talk about, the opera becomes so much more interesting. It's also what led us to include so much of the dialogue. Exploring that prism of telling the story requires us to restore so much of the original dialogue, because with it we can go into so much more depth.'

'A critical thing is understanding that Pasha Selim begins as a Christian and chooses to convert to Islam, which is something which is so often lost, and it's central to the entire story. That and his back story with Belmonte's dad. And when he explains the story, you understand that he has made a conscious choice to embrace this culture, this religion, this world. But he bridges both worlds. And all the characters, apart from Osmin who is locked into hatred, achieve a level of understanding and respect for each other. It's very important. Achieving that equilibrium of mutual understanding, despite difference, is central to all Mozartian opera. Maybe not *Don Giovanni*, but *Figaro* certainly. *Cosi* is a hellscape where mutual understanding falls apart. I think it's probably the most frightening of all Mozart operas.'

'And then with *The Magic Flute*, despite virulently misogynistic statements which come up in the text and are very problematic, ultimately the mythos of that opera is about union, it's about mutual understanding and equality. And I think that's always something that Mozart's searching for. *Idomeneo* was his first mature opera, but I think *Entführung* is where he sets out his stall, saying this is my vision for humanity – and he talks about understanding, love and compassion. And understanding difference. And that's why I think it's important to stage *Entführung* now – today.'

### Festival 2026

'In Festival 2026 Liv Redpath is our new Konstanze. I haven't worked with her before but I'm aware of her talent. I'm so happy Michael Mofidian is coming to do Osmin, he's a fellow Glaswegian and we know each other quite well, he's super. The two tenors are both from America – Anthony León's [Belmonte] voice is beautiful beyond belief (see opposite page) and Thomas Cilluffo [Pedrillo], is a sensational actor. I worked with Julie Roset [Blonde] in Paris last year, and she's perfect. It's going to be great!'

↖ Johannes Martin Kranzle (Sixtus Beckmesser) and Gerald Finley (Hans Sachs) in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Festival 2011

↑ Franck Saurel (Pasha Selim) and Sally Matthews (Konstanze) in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Festival 2015

# MUSIC, TEXT AND SPECTACLE

**William Kentridge** will make his debut in Festival 2026 directing a new production of *L'Orfeo*, Glyndebourne's first. **Nerissa Taysom** profiles the prolific artist and director.

In a recent interview about directing opera, the artist William Kentridge stated: 'I like to think of the job more as a four-dimensional drawing with this extraordinary canvas, 18 metres by 12 metres, the size of the proscenium. [I'm given] two years to work on it and they throw in one of the great orchestras of the world, and ten of the best singers in the world, and a fantastic chorus, and a conductor, and a costume department, and the possibility of working with the collaborators I most treasure... we make this four-dimensional drawing: the depth, height, width and passage through time. And the structure of this drawing is given by the music and the libretto of the opera... This combination of music, text and spectacle acknowledges and celebrates the form and the excess of sensory experience that opera always involves. It is about there being too much to see and experience that is important.'

William Kentridge is one of the most compelling and critically acclaimed artists working today. His virtuosic practice spans drawing, painting, film, animation, sound, tapestry, sculpture, puppetry, theatre and opera. Often monumental in scope, his works burst with ideas and imagery, and shrewd commentary on politics, science, literature and history. The visionary worlds he creates and reflects on are surprising, disruptive, humorous and spectacular. Kentridge has exhibited in many major museums and galleries since the 1990s, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Albertina Museum, Vienna; Musée du Louvre, Paris; Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen and most recently in the UK, at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2022) and Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2025). His profile has seen him receive many international accolades including an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy in 2015 and the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera for *Sibyl* in 2023.

Kentridge was born in 1955 in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he continues to live and work. His parents were both celebrated anti-apartheid lawyers, and as a young student activist he was deeply engaged with the political fractures and inequalities of South African society. He studied Political Science, African Studies and Fine Art in Johannesburg before briefly pursuing theatre at the École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris. This multimodal education laid the foundation for his multidisciplinary practice: political study provided a nuanced understanding of historical and social structures, his art training supplied the visual vocabulary, and theatre offered the spaces and collaborators to bring ideas to life.

Kentridge's breakthrough in the art world came in the 1980s with a series of vivid charcoal drawings responding to the conditions experienced in South Africa. International attention followed when he transformed these drawings into short animated films in the *Drawings for Projection* series (1989–2020). Each of the nine films begins with a charcoal drawing, which is meticulously altered or erased, frame by frame. In sequence, these drawings appear, dissolve and mutate before the viewer's eyes – visual palimpsests for how history is recorded, forgotten, remembered and reworked.

Drawing remains the tangible starting point for Kentridge's multimodal practice, whether still-life of coffee pots and studio objects, or the undulating topography of his native South Africa, fractured by the legacies of colonialism. Monochrome works are punctuated by coloured pencil or pastel, often red, as if mapping a trajectory for the eye or marking a boundary, a way of changing the horizon line of a work. Collage and visual assemblages are also prominent features of his works, whether large-scale sculptures in riotous yellow and blue such as *Paper Procession* (2025), developed from hand-torn paper models, or his use of dictionary



← *The Nose* directed by William Kentridge, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, 2010

pages, ledger books, encyclopedias, or historical texts as surfaces for drawing. In his short film *Soft Dictionary* (2016), Kentridge presents a flip-book of figurative drawings, portraits and text pieces (*Yesterday's Good Idea / The Sound of Ink*). Painting directly onto old dictionary pages, he establishes an immediate dialogue between the image and the surface which is simultaneously driven by narrative – what does this visual arrangement say about the world? – and temporal – how is this drama going to unfold? The artwork becomes a miniature piece of theatre, something provisional. It also emphasises the instability of memory and the malleability of history and language. Did we see or read that correctly? Drawing becomes a way of thinking through the uncertainties and possibilities for the world, acknowledging that it is always shifting, always in motion.

As an artist who is driven by a commitment to process, Kentridge's studio is central to his practice. The studio, which refers both to the physical space – a large, floodlit warehouse – and his network of collaborators – is deliberately porous. Drawings inform film; film loops return to the stage; theatrical rehearsals inspire sculptural installations; and sound, which is ever-present, functions as both an anchor and provocation. The artist in his white space jostles alongside actors, dancers, musicians and makers. Writing recently, Kentridge stated: 'The studio is an enlarged head. The images on the walls of the room and their movement stand in for the emergence and movement of thoughts in the head. The world is invited into the studio. There it is fragmented. The fragments are rearranged and sent back out into the world as a drawing, a performance, or a text'.<sup>2</sup> Extending this ethos of experimentation and collaboration, Kentridge

founded the Centre for the Less Good Idea in 2016, a space devoted to experimental, interdisciplinary and collaborative practice.

Kentridge's multimodal and collaborative approach is perhaps most vividly understood in his large-scale theatre and opera productions. These have included Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Shostakovich's *The Nose* and Alban Berg's *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*, which have been staged at venues including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Sydney Opera House, La Monnaie and the Salzburg Festival. As director for *The Magic Flute*, Kentridge put video projection at the heart of his production, stating that 'sometimes the projections are scenery, sometimes an attempt to find a visual equivalent to the music, sometimes they are comments on what is being sung'. For Kentridge, the 'four-dimensional drawing' is an ongoing negotiation of visual, sonic and dramaturgical elements, enacted by those performing but also activated by those who witness it.

Whether on paper, or on film, or on stage, Kentridge's works unfold through processes of accumulation, erasure and reassembly, always inviting viewers or audiences to navigate shifting perspectives and layered meaning. This facility to move between art forms and the capacity to use different modes of storytelling makes Kentridge an exceptionally exciting artist to be working with in 2026. ●

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1 *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Music and Art* (2023), Bloomsbury Academic, p. 307

2 [hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/william-kentridge-a-natural-history-of-the-studio](http://hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/william-kentridge-a-natural-history-of-the-studio)

# THREE GREAT WRITERS, ONE OPERA

**Philippa Burbidge** traces the work of literary giants Herman Melville and EM Forster in the creation of Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*.

*Billy Budd* was the final, unfinished work by New York-born writer Herman Melville (1819–1891), best known for the thrilling sea adventure *Moby Dick*. At the heart of Melville's *Billy Budd* is the tale of a 'handsome sailor', whose innocence is preyed upon and manipulated to a tragic end. It is a meditation on desire and sexuality, morality and justice, set against a backdrop of sea, suspicion and revolutionary unrest. Although Melville was working on it at the time of his death, the novella was not rediscovered and published until 1924.

Coincidentally, this was the same year as *A Passage to India* was published – the greatest novel by London-born writer EM Forster (1879–1972), Benjamin Britten's chosen librettist for the opera.

Music was a companion and a rich source of inspiration to EM Forster throughout his life. It is woven into the plots and structure of all his novels – most notably in *A Room With a View* and *Howard's End*. His own piano playing provided him with a safe

haven during his school days in Tonbridge, and he experienced his first opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, at Covent Garden in 1898 while he was a student at Cambridge. From that point on he was a lifelong opera-goer (he visited Glyndebourne to see *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1959).

Britten and Forster first met in the late 1930s. While Britten was living in America in 1941 he read Forster's article about poet George Crabbe, whose poem *The Borough* (about small town life in Suffolk) became the direct inspiration for his first large-scale opera, *Peter Grimes* (1943–44). In 1944, Britten invited Forster to contribute to a symposium on *Peter Grimes*, which confirmed the friendship between the two men; in 1947 Forster was the dedicatee of Britten's comic opera *Albert Herring*. Later, in June 1948, Britten approached Forster with a proposal for writing the libretto for his sixth major opera, which had been commissioned for the Festival of Britain in 1951.



For a 70-year-old author, battling ill health and writer's block, it was a welcome invitation. Discussions about potential subjects followed, together with Eric Crozier, Britten's collaborator on many of his earlier operas. The idea to try Melville's *Billy Budd* was probably Britten's, but it was a story familiar to Forster, and one which appealed to him.

Melville's novella is set against the background of the French Revolutionary Wars in the 1790s, and in particular during a period when the British Navy and government had been alarmed by British mutinies at Spithead (near Portsmouth) and The Nore (in the Thames Estuary). The young seaman Billy Budd is serving on the English warship 'The Bellipotent' ('The Indomitable' in the opera). He has come from another ship called 'The Rights of Man'. That name of course carried radical connotations; a book with this title by Thomas Paine, a one-time resident of Lewes, had been a seminal contribution to revolutionary thinking, so Billy becomes a suspect simply by association. Melville's original text describes mutiny as like 'the distempering eruption of a contagious fever in a frame constitutionally sound'; and 'mutiny' becomes a central musical theme in the opera. This is a good example of how adapting the original story into the medium of music can enhance, extend and exalt the power of Melville's words on the page. Influenced by Wagner's use of *leitmotifs*, the 'Mutiny theme' (a rising fifth followed by a rising minor second) appears at various times in the opera – right from Act I, where waves of potential threat to power and control are bubbling under the surface.

The setting of the story on a ship (so beautifully rendered in Michael Grandage's 2010 Glyndebourne production by designer Christopher Oram) provides a naturally claustrophobic cauldron in which characters can simmer and boil over, both inwardly and outwardly. The villainous Master-at-Arms, John Claggart, a 'scorpion-like' figure 'with no power to annul the elemental evil in him' (Melville), is a primary example of a character living in an echo-chamber, choked by claustrophobia and repression.

Aspects of Melville's novella offered particular challenges. One of these was its use of an unnamed narrator, who makes frequent moral and theological digressions. Crozier had the idea of adding a Prologue and an Epilogue to the opera, given to Captain Vere; this serves both to shape the narrative in a theatrical fashion and to position Vere at the emotional centre of the tale – 'I have tried to guide others rightly, but I have been lost on the infinite sea' (Prologue).

Another significant challenge was presenting the character Claggart. In a letter to Britten, Forster had singled Claggart out for his 'natural depravity'. He added: 'Melville, I believe, was often trying to do what I've tried to do... the ordinary lovable (and hatable) human beings connected with immensities through the tricks of art... I believe that your music may effect the connections better than our words'. But this did not always prove straightforward, and the most documented disagreement between composer and librettist in the opera involved Claggart's soliloquy 'O beauty, O handsomeness, goodness!'. It has become one of the most admired moments of the opera, yet when he heard Britten's first interpretation of his words for this monologue, Forster had been disappointed with the music, and wrote to the composer in frustration: 'I want passion... love constricted, poisoned, but flowing down its agonising channel; a sexual discharge gone evil.' After some difficult exchanges Britten made revisions; the end result described as 'the finely wrought, almost Verdian set-piece aria that Forster was evidently seeking' (Philip Reed, 'On the Sketches for *Billy Budd*').

Billy Budd himself is an innocent, in both the novella and the opera. In Melville, he is like a lamb to the slaughter – a character who can't defend himself due to his stutter – 'he was everything a sailor should be, yet under sudden provocation... his voice, otherwise singularly musical, was apt to develop an organic hesitancy... a stutter'. In the opera, Billy retains this sense of innocence and is described as 'a pearl of great price', yet the music enables his character to be more free and expressive – no more so than in his first aria 'Billy Budd, king of the birds', where the music is liberating and exultant. The bird imagery is also revisited at the end of the opera in Vere's Epilogue: 'We committed his body to the deep. The sea fowl enshadowed him with their wings, their harsh cries were his requiem'. At this moment, Britten's music reflects the ominous sound of the waves from the opening of the opera, oscillating between major and minor keys, reflecting the inherent tensions of the plot. Captain Vere's tenor voice rides the crest of these sound waves, uniting the words and music to poignant effect. It is one moment, but illustrates how remarkably the three voices – writer, librettist and composer – become one. ●

Philippa is Glyndebourne's Senior Marketing Manager

Michelle Fillion

*Difficult Rhythm: Music and the Word in*  
EM Forster, University of Illinois Press

Neil Powell  
Philip Reed

*Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music*, Brewin Books  
'The finest libretto ever written', Glyndebourne  
Festival Programme Book, 2010

# MUSICAL BEAUTY

The contrasting music of Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* invites us to consider beauty not just in the lofty, but the popular, the light and the comic writes **Alexandra Coghlan**.

According to *Ariadne auf Naxos*' zealous young Composer: 'One art is holier than all the others, and music is that holy art'. You won't hear any argument from an opera company. But while the Composer's definition of his precious, sacred art is narrow – classical music, complex and philosophical – Strauss' score proposes an altogether broader designation, inviting us to consider the beauty not just in the lofty, but the popular, the light, the comic. Sometimes art is the Composer's 'holy flame', sometimes it's the playful gust of wind that blows it out.

Strauss' *Ariadne* is two scores for the price of one: an *opera buffa* and an *opera seria*. It's the opera for those who can't choose between the musical whipped-cream and filigree gilding of *Der Rosenkavalier* and the rich ambiguity of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

The plot – an opera-within-and-opera in which realities and fictions blur and mesh – sees a light-hearted comedy and a serious opera collide in a chaotic command-performance at the home of the 'richest man in Vienna'. Strauss' chameleon-score relishes and mirrors this duality, painting the rival worlds of Zerbinetta and her burlesque troupe and the Composer's mythological Ariadne and Bacchus in contrasting musical colours, voices and textures.

The Prologue starts us off in Zerbinetta's everyday world, among the bustle of party preparations and servants: conversational, brittle, lively, fast-paced. Strauss takes the swift musical back-and-forth of Mozart's comedies and fleshes out the secco recitative into something more substantial and sustained – an endless chain of little melodies.

That this light-footed, translucent ease is possible is thanks to a very different orchestra to the large forces Strauss demands for *Rosenkavalier* and *Elektra*. Here we get a compact near-chamber band

of 37 – light on strings (who are also deliberately top-heavy – dominated by violins) and brass, and heavy on woodwind, percussion and various keyboard instruments. The effect is brilliant, highly characterised, an orchestra treated as an ensemble of soloists for much of the time. A cello comments laconically; a clarinet wriggles with delight; a bassoon delivers a straight-faced one-liner.

As for the vocal writing for this lighter world, there's more than a hint of *bel canto* in its dazzling display and love of a good tune. While Zerbinetta herself gets the athletic show-stoppers of a true heroine (more of that in a minute), her troupe bring folk and salon-type songs with them. In an attempt to cheer up the abandoned Ariadne they offer up their best: the rollicking little ensemble '*Es gilt, ob Tanzen, ob Singen tauge*' ('Will dancing and singing perchance avail us') with its oom-pah rhythm and piquant clarinet, and Harlequin's '*Lieben, Hassen, Hoffen, Zagen*' ('Loving, hating, hoping, fearing') – a charming serenade to the guitar-like accompaniment of plucked strings and piano. Neither, however, proves effective.

Step forward Zerbinetta with the musical big guns. Her '*Grossmächtige Prinzessin*' ('Your gracious Royal Highness') is – to quote William Mann – 'The show-stopping virtuoso coloratura star solo to end all show-stopping virtuoso coloratura solos.' At once a technical showcase of skill and a mission-statement in music, it's a mic-drop answer to Ariadne's own aria welcoming death. Why embrace death, argues Zerbinetta, when you can embrace a new man instead? Over 12 minutes of ultra-demanding writing (which originally extended up to a top F sharp, though was subsequently revised down to a still-stratospheric top D) Strauss invites his heroine to set out her stall.

Starting with a glittering musical laugh, Zerbinetta launches into music of gauzy lightness and

mercurial mood-shifts, carried on an orchestral breeze. Recitative gives way to a sustained cantabile section 'Noch glaub'ich dem' and then a florid arioso 'So was es mitt Paglazzo', ending with a spectacular cadenza. Finally, a fiendish Rondo 'Als ein Gott' captures the flighty, flirty essence of this glossy pragmatist.

But all this is – of course – just one side of the story. *Ariadne* reinvents itself after the Prologue, the orchestra suddenly gaining silky richness and a gleaming diaphanous quality, discovering new harmonic lushness and chromaticism, full of ambiguity and deferred resolutions. The musical 'hinge' is the Composer's aria 'Sein wird wieder gut' ('Let us be reconciled'), whose vocal line tugs across barlines – straining, but never breaking the 4/4 musical leash, while the orchestra below shifts endlessly through different time-signatures: two styles audibly at odds.

Ariadne beckons us into another sonic landscape with her ravishing sequence of solos, opening with the broken fragility of 'Wo war ich?' ('Where was I?') – the song of a woman whose musical identity and energy have all been stripped away. By whom? We soon discover in her lament 'Ein Schönes war' ('There was something beautiful') – a sudden musical blossoming, the voice unfolding upward and outwards, discovering new emotional scope within the opera as Ariadne reminisces about the faithless Theseus (represented by a lurking horn) who has abandoned her.

Echoes of *Tristan und Isolde* hang around Ariadne's music, coming into focus in her scena 'Es gibt ein Reich' ('There is a land') – as close to a *Liebestod* as this more earthly heroine gets. Her surrender and passivity are reflected in an opening phrase on a monotone: she is musically motionless, beyond melody. But gradually both her line and the orchestra come back to life. Woodwind creep in to join the strings, as hints of life return and solemnity is replaced by an (initially) cautious ecstasy. When she first speaks the name of this mysterious land 'Totenreich' ('The Kingdom of Death') the vocal line drops down an octave – plunging into the musical Underworld. The volume of the aria remains muted for a long time, until finally she swells to her theme in music of real passion and sensuality – death is welcomed almost as a lover – that rises to, then falls dramatically away from, a top B flat.

The opera's final duet for Ariadne and Bacchus 'Gibt es kein Hinüber' ('Shall we not cross over') is an apotheosis in every sense. Bacchus persuades Ariadne to ascend into the heavens with him in music that soars and plunges – a sustained climax to the opera (as well as the opera-within-and-



opera). Horns add heft and a heroic quality to Bacchus' writing, while shimmering string tremolos, harp and high woodwind (similar colours to the silver rose music from *Rosenkavalier*) help conjure Ariadne's transformation.

The sense of two people and two worlds (mortal and divine) coming together is conveyed in music that occupies two different keys at once. Have Ariadne's two halves finally come together? It's an ending that, rather than resolve tensions or untangle confusions, instead leans into them. Duality, opposition, contradiction: there's beauty here too, Strauss tells us. It's time to stop worrying and learn to love life – and art's – perpetual tug of war. ●

↑ Director Laurent Pelly (left) and conductor Robin Ticciati in rehearsals for *Mamelles de Tirésias* (Poulenc double bill) in Festival 2022. They will work together again on the new production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* this year

# CRAFTING COMEDY

Mariame Clément and Ian Rutherford speak to **Joe Fuller** about how they hone comedy through rehearsals and what makes *Il turco in Italia* so funny...

After directing a new production of *Le nozze di Figaro* for the 2025 Festival, Mariame Clément's next production at Glyndebourne is a revival of 2021's *Il turco in Italia*. Although both are ensemble comedies, they are very different works: has Mariame's approach to directing changed over time?

'I have had the same approach for *Turco, Figaro, Don Pasquale*: to take it very seriously and not go in for superficial situations,' says Mariame. 'To really work on the text in detail, especially in the recits. Not just at a surface level like inserting gags but exploring what is the motor of the scene, where it is going, where are the tensions?'

'It is important to make sure the singers understand exactly what they are saying and why they are saying it. How I start every rehearsal is reading the text with the singers and discussing what is being said: why are you saying it, to whom, what does it announce? It gives the comedy a strong architecture, a strong skeleton to build on.'

Ian Rutherford worked with Mariame as Assistant Director on the original Festival 2021 production of *Turco*, as Revival Director for its first revival in autumn 2024, and returns to revive the production again in Festival 2026. I speak to Mariame and Ian separately but their priorities in directing comedy are strikingly similar. 'The singers need to know their relationships to everybody else and have to believe in the characters,' says Ian. 'When you leave the stage: where are you going, why are you leaving? It affects your exit and what the audience thinks about you when you're in the wings. Here at Glyndebourne, we have so much beautiful rehearsal time where we can achieve this through practice.'

What makes audiences laugh in *Turco*? 'Rossini is intrinsically funny,' says Mariame. 'He mastered the language of classical music, using structures and the canonic form so brilliantly. He expertly uses over-the-top repetitions, crescendos and breaks for comedic effect.'

'The text is also very yummy; very witty. In the trio in the first act, known as "*Un poeta ostinato*" (meaning a "stubborn poet"), there are some great lines such as "leave lovers alone and don't interfere in their affairs, or you'll have a badly beaten poet in your story" ("*Lasci vivere i galanti e non badi al loro stato; o un poeta bastonato io farò nel dramma entrar*"). And the quartet in the first act ("*Siete turchi, non vi credo*") where they all sing at the same time, addressing different people in quick succession, interrupting each other mid-sentence ("curse him; yes you're right!") alongside alternating, angry asides is all very funny.'

'There is a lot of text in *Turco* to milk, a lot of really good comedic situations. In the second act, we stage a scene in a *salumeria* [delicatessen]: it appears to be about a cultural exchange of food at first, but it becomes something brutal with a duel. It's not just comic; the characters take themselves seriously and we never treat them as archetypes alone: there are motivations, weaknesses and tragedy in each scene.'

Timing is a recurring theme during my conversations with both directors. 'One thing I'm obsessed with is processing time to understand something,' says Ian. 'I still believe in the basics,' he adds. 'Comedy is in the feet: getting someone in the right position to say the payoff or punchline, for a key comic moment to land. Comedy has to have precise choreography. That precision involves when the thought happens: before, during or after the line.' He acts out an exaggerated theatrical thought process to demonstrate what he means: "'The door...'" a pause of around two seconds while he ponders the situation with furrowed brows and then his eyes widen in a vivid eureka! moment: "'I saw her there!'". I realise I have seen such epiphanies landing well with audiences on the Glyndebourne stage on several occasions.



'In this production where we have the poet imagining writing the story, he is making the action happen,' says Mariame. 'The way he freezes his characters during his creative process, these fermatas [a pause in musical notation], are very useful for us, really funny, because they reflect how the story is unfolding before our eyes. There is a pause, suspending the tension: "What's gonna happen..." the audience is thinking. They are a wonderful comedic tool.'

The 'beautiful rehearsal time' that Ian mentioned can also result in some alchemical discoveries in the cast. In the Festival 2021 production, it transpired that Rodion Pogossov (Geronio) and Elena Tsallagova (Florilla) had both trained as ballet dancers. 'This meant that in the dream sequence, they could express it through ballet, and the two singers created the most remarkable thing,' says Ian. 'It wasn't choreographed: it was hilarious and beautifully judged and stunning.' This initial collaboration between the two performers will be recreated in 2026: Rodion is returning as Geronio and will be joined by Elena Villalón as Fiorilla, who will make her Glyndebourne debut.

Mariame points out that the Festival 2021 production was made during Covid restrictions so onstage interactions were limited, including singers not being permitted to hand each other props and not being able to sing directly towards one another. 'Part of my job in 2024 was releasing that where necessary,' adds Ian. 'Funnily enough the distancing was quite useful for the rigidity of the comedy onstage so we did retain a lot of it. Releasing the chorus so they can dance with each other was delightful though: it's now more intimate and fun'.

All of the work crafting the comedy throughout rehearsals for *Turco* should make for what Ian calls 'a wildly entertaining evening'. He adds that 'the brilliance of Mariame's production is that the poet's witty ideas are manifested into 3D instantly. There is a heightened sense of theatricality to certain scenes because sometimes what is around the characters doesn't make sense to them, then they look over to the poet to come up with a more appropriate idea. It looks into the alacrity of a mind and how it can create ideas and make mistakes. It's a fresh sort of humour: genuinely funny, visually surprising and sumptuous. We are thrilled to be bringing *Turco* back to life for our wonderful Glyndebourne audience.' ●

↑ Elena Tsallagova (Fiorilla) and Rodion Pogossov (Geronio), as trained ballet dancers, helped create the ballet sequence in Festival 2021's *Il turco in Italia*



# CONDUCTING COMEDY

Festival 2026 will see Vincenzo Milletari conduct *Il turco in Italia* for the first time. He speaks to **Joe Fuller**.

'It is the last big comedy from Rossini to tick off my dream list,' says Vincenzo. 'It's a beautiful *dramma giocoso* [drama with jokes] which is very close in my opinion to Mozart's Da Ponte operas, especially regarding the portrait of a bourgeoisie full of contradictions and the tridimensional portrait of the characters.'

'Musical timing is fundamental in order to make the comedy land with the audience nowadays, so comedy requires a lot more stage precision than tragedy. It is important to understand what the director wants and what the comic structure needs so you can pace and calibrate the music at exactly the right moment. It's a matter of split seconds if it works or not, which means there is a lot of work to do in rehearsals.'

'Conducting comedy is a much more collaborative process compared to working on a dramatic piece. In *Tosca*, for example, where the energy of the story is so strong, if a door opens five seconds too early or too late, it doesn't change the story

or situation drastically. Whereas in comedy, if someone arrives too early, the whole comic structure can be compromised.'

'I have been in operas long enough to understand that the one person who should suffer or laugh most is the audience member. When a conductor gets to the point in those euphoric, fast musical parts of a Rossini opera, the only mind that should be crystal clear should be the conductor's.'

'As the great conductor Franco Ferrara used to say: a conductor should have a "cold mind and warm heart". It can be a bittersweet situation at times because you can never be completely driven by the music; you have to control the ship. Some part of you still has to be present to keep everyone on track, but it's worth it so the audience is free to be transported by the beauty of music.' ●

↑ Michael Motidian (Selim), Inna Demenkova (Florilla) and Fabio Capitanucci (Geronio) in the Autumn Season 2024 revival of *Il turco in Italia*

# CHAMPIONING BIODIVERSITY

**Gus Christie** recaps recent activity and details forthcoming plans for the Glyndebourne gardens.

The Glyndebourne gardens are an integral part of the audience experience every year – often referred to as the ‘seventh production of the Festival’ – they are continuously evolving.

Last year we engaged a local ecologist, Dave Barker, to help us enhance our biodiversity and wildlife ambitions. He was impressed with what we are already doing with all our wildflower meadows interspersing the more formal borders; and the two wild beehives, which I am delighted to say, are both thriving. But there is obviously more that we can do. You will notice a new strip of long grasses along the fence-line on the right of the lake – this will provide another wildlife corridor, and I hope we will see more orchids colonise this strip – the Early Purple, Pyramidal, Twayblade, Helleborine and Bee orchids.

We have more log and brash piles around and about, which are good habitats for amphibians and reptiles. We are hoping to build more bird and bat boxes too. And we’re working on new changes to the lake. We are planning to clear out many of the large carp, which have become over-dominant and eat all the smaller fish and tadpoles, and are introducing some stickleback, which eat the smaller carp. This will hopefully encourage other fish, once introduced – such as perch and roach – to proliferate alongside frogs, newts, dragonflies, damselflies and mayflies.

We continue to minimise chemical use in the gardens – we now use our own compost on the borders instead of buying it in, have expanded the size of our compost bins, and are using an aliphilic Ace mix which includes predatory wasps to keep aphids and other pests in the greenhouses under control. We introduced lace-wing larvae in the beech hedges to control the whitefly.

As far as planting in the borders is concerned, we are predominantly planting native plants but are also planting more Mediterranean plants, such as *Salvias* and *Sedum*, which are very good for bees. It is becoming increasingly challenging with hotter summers and wetter winters, so we will adapt our



planting with more resilient species. This is the same for our tree planting, where we are trying out a variety of species, such as *Liriodendron tulipifera* (Tulip), *Tilia oliveri* (Oliver's Lime), *Juglans mollis* (Mexican Walnut), *Quercus canariensis* (Algerian Oak) and *Castanea mollissima* (Chinese Chestnut).

As some of you may know, we have an extensive dye garden at the far end of our vegetable patch, which is now lovingly tended by one of our gardeners, Andrea Benson. She collaborates with Dye Room Supervisor, Jenny Mercer, who uses these plants to create natural dyes for our costumes. They both featured in a recent episode of *Gardeners' World* with Frances Tophill (still on BBC iPlayer – Episode 25 – if you missed it). ●

Gus is Glyndebourne's Executive Chairman

↑ Our two wild beehives are thriving

# PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF DESIGN

Archivist **Philip Boot** gives an update on donated works to the Archive Collection following our stage design appeal in 2024.



Glyndebourne's stage design appeal, launched in *Recit* last year, has successfully brought a number of designs back to Glyndebourne, all now forming part of our ever-expanding and important permanent collection of artworks.

The art and design collection is an actively growing element of the Archive, comprising approximately 700 works. It features key stage designs by John Piper, Rosemary Vercoe, Caspar Neher and John Bury, alongside theatrical and performance-related artworks by David Hockney, Tom Hammick, Maggi Hambling and Peter Doig, to name a few. Thanks to the generosity of members, we've been able to expand the collection with new additions, including three Emanuele Luzzati designs from *Macbeth* (1964), a Leslie Hurry design for Leonore from *La forza del destino* (1951), a design by Russel Craig from *La bohème* (1991) and designs from both *Eugene Onegin* (1994) and *Manon Lescaut* (1997) by Richard Hudson. Most surprisingly (but very welcome), we received an original costume from 1963's *Capriccio*, designed by Anthony Powell and worn by Horst Wilhelm, making it one of the few pre-1970s costumes in the collection.

These designs, artworks and costumes offer a wealth of information for researchers, including students, GFS members and curators. They provide a deep understanding of past productions, designers and their practice, and open new avenues for artistic and academic exploration. Recently donated artworks are already being considered for future exhibitions, whilst an Oliver Messel design from Glyndebourne's 1951 *Idomeneo* was on display as part of the *Oliver Messel: Designer. Maker. Influencer* exhibition during the 2025 Festival and Autumn Season, allowing us to show the drawing to the general public for the first time. Several donations to the Archive Collection are currently earmarked for short-term loans to other organisations, broadening their appeal to new audiences and giving them a second life. As we look towards our 100th anniversary in 2034, we hope to exhibit some of these works at Glyndebourne, in addition to showcasing more online.

An exciting outcome from the appeal is the (re-)discoveries we have made, including designs never seen by the public for over 60 years. Some designs were only ever captured in black and white photography – taken swiftly on a workroom table in the costume department. A small number of these valuable objects were only ever seen

in the background of shots, caught in a behind-the-scenes photograph of a costume parade, designer's studio or workroom, their intricate details not visible. Others, remarkably, were never formally recorded, with only stage photography serving as evidence that the costume or set had existed. These exciting discoveries include both works we knew existed and those we had never seen before, for which we had no record. Whether these have been donated back or simply flagged to us, an awareness of them and their location is invaluable. These works are important.

A unifying theme across all the designs is their cherished *other* life. These theatrical blueprints now serve as poignant reminders of joyful experiences at Glyndebourne, treasured memories passed down by loved ones, and as integral contributions to a designer's broader legacy. We recognise that entrusting these pieces to our keeping can be a deeply personal and significant decision. We are committed to the meticulous care of our art and design collection, which includes professional conservation, comprehensive documentation and cataloguing, reglazing frames with UV-protective glass to prevent light damage and secure storage. Our aim is for every work we hold, whether displayed online, in exhibitions or in print, to be shown at its absolute best. Through these and other mediums, we aim to maximise their exposure, increasing public awareness of them, the collection and Glyndebourne's commissioning history on- and off-stage. This significant appeal is a collaborative endeavour between us and you – Glyndebourne and those that donate works to the Archive – to preserve the rich legacy of art and design that has existed here since 1934.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who have generously donated and entrusted us with their designs and artworks. Our appreciation also goes to the designers' estates who reached out, to everyone who engaged in discussions about future donations, and to those who are still considering contributing works to the Glyndebourne Archive Collection. ●

Philip is Glyndebourne's Archivist

*If you wish to donate an original Glyndebourne stage design to our collection or start a conversation with us about donating works, please contact [phil.boot@glyndebourne.com](mailto:phil.boot@glyndebourne.com)*

# SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

**Charlie Alexander** has started the huge process of cataloguing significant correspondence within the Glyndebourne Archive, covering 1934-64, and in doing so finds Audrey Mildmay in equal partnership with her husband, John Christie.

In July 2024, during Glyndebourne's 90th year, I began a project to catalogue a large collection of correspondence which is held in the Glyndebourne Archive. This work was generously supported by the Sidney E Frank Foundation.

Covering the period from 1934 to 1964, the selected letters and documents detail the foundation and early development of Glyndebourne, as told through the words and exchanges of key figures including founders John Christie and Audrey Mildmay, music director Fritz Busch, artistic director Carl Ebert, and general managers Rudolf Bing and Moran Caplat. Together, this correspondence forms a rich historical record of Glyndebourne's initial artistic and administrative operations. It is also among the most frequently requested material by researchers, making its cataloguing a priority for improved accessibility and reach.

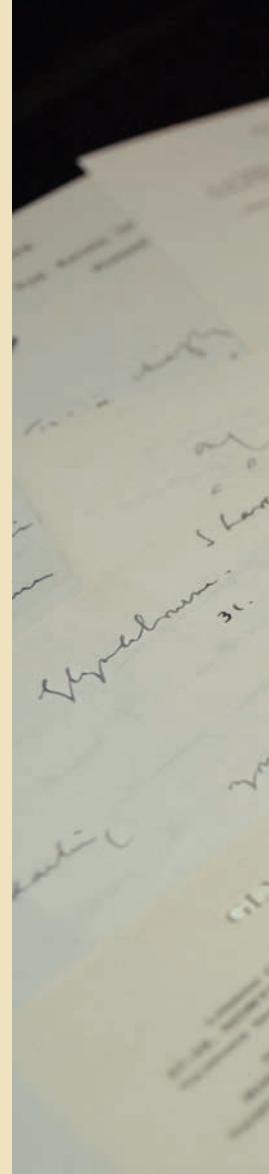
Cataloguing is not simply creating a list, but a comprehensive process of taking intellectual and physical control of a collection. Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to begin. Faced with a wall of archival boxes, my first task was to spend time familiarising myself with the letters and the distinctive writing styles of their authors – from John Christie's ebullient expressions of his opinion to Moran Caplat's affable efficiency. I also began safely removing a motley crew of rusty staples and other fasteners and rehousing letters in new archival folders.

The next step was to structure an 'archival tree' for the catalogue. Starting at the top with the whole correspondence

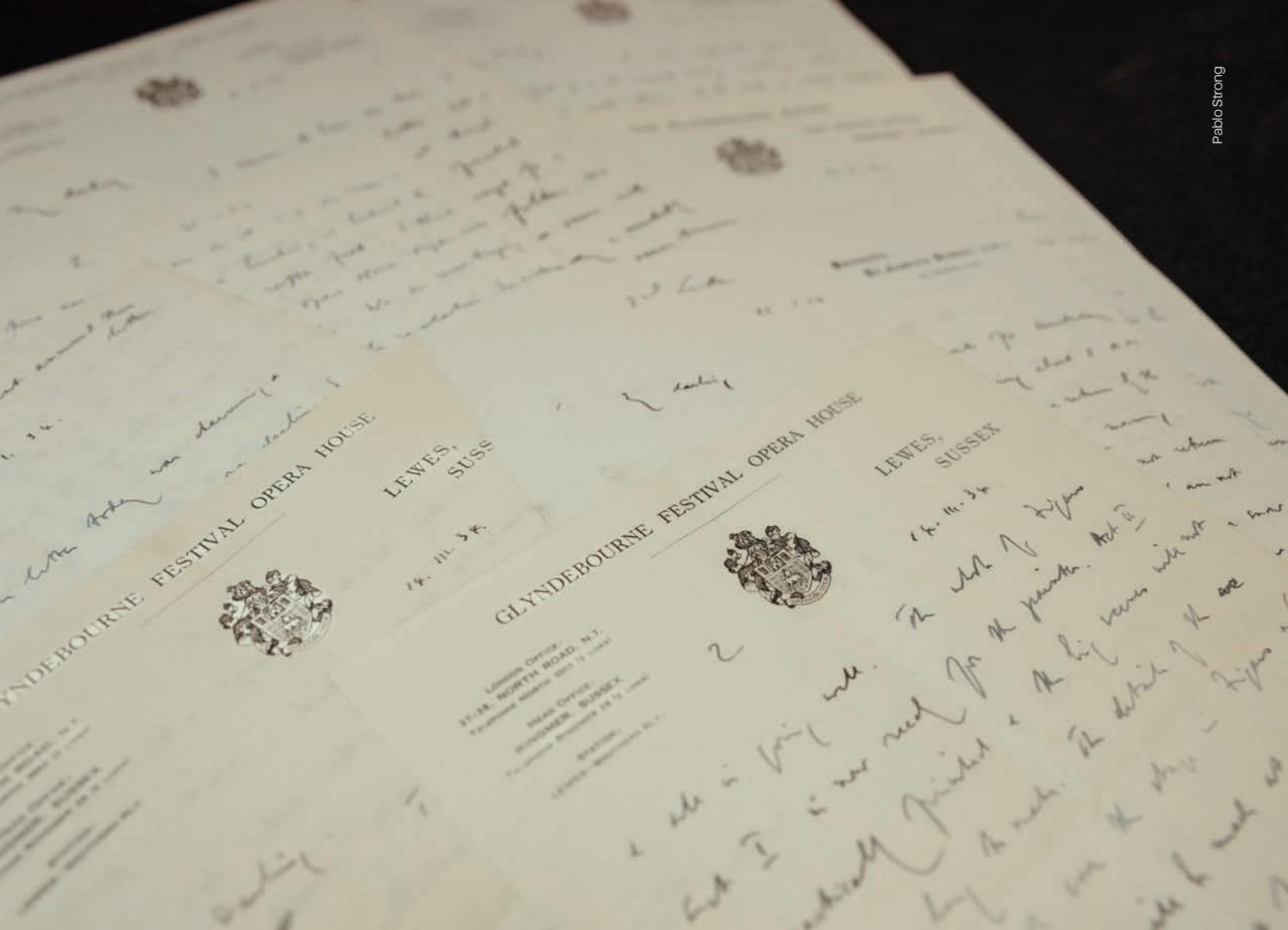
collection, the tree then branches out into the various series of letters that were written or received by Glyndebourne's central personalities. These series divide further into separate files (the twigs) and finally into individual letters, which represent the leaves. This hierarchical, top-down approach allows researchers to navigate from a broad overview of the collection to the most specific level, while clearly illustrating and preserving the relationships between different records. Cataloguing always takes longer than anyone imagines, and so, with time being of the essence for this project, the majority of the correspondence has been catalogued to file rather than item level.

I began the cataloguing process with the letters John Christie wrote and received between 1934 and 1962. It quickly became apparent that John was an exemplary letter writer and 'an energetic person with vision', who strove to achieve 'the highest artistic standards in opera'. He was deeply committed to music and in 1940 worked to establish a National Council of Music to 'represent music as an art'. Reminiscing in 1960, he wrote that he wanted to 'bring back to this country what was normal on the Continent, but hardly existed in England. The result is Glyndebourne'. John was also adamant that Glyndebourne was, '... Audrey's plan – she was the leader... I said I should not have done this without her. She said she could not have done it without me'.

The correspondence provides evidence that the Glyndebourne John and Audrey created in the English countryside was, from the outset, a gathering place for



↑ Letters in Glyndebourne's Archive chart a course through Glyndebourne's first 30 years



international operatic talent. There are letters sent by singers, musicians and directors from all around the globe and many are written in French, German and Italian.

The letters, and particularly those of Rudolf Bing and Moran Caplat, chart a course through Glyndebourne's first 30 years: from the success of the 1934 to 1939 period, through to closure during the Second World War and, 'Glyndebourne's first venture outside its own boundaries', with *The Beggar's Opera* in 1940. The war had a considerable impact on Glyndebourne and the letters of the mid-to late-1940s reveal how hard the organisation fought to stay 'alive and active' and endeavoured to 'keep the flag of art flying', despite things looking 'pretty grim still'.

The deaths of Fritz Busch and Audrey in the early 1950s and John in 1962 were keenly felt and there are many touching tributes to them in the

correspondence. Speaking of John, for example, Gerald Croasdell of The British Actors' Equity Association wrote, 'his loss is a severe one but we hope that Glyndebourne will long continue as a living testimony to his vision and enterprise'.

Throughout the 1950s, an increasing sense of professionalism percolates into the correspondence. The introduction of the Festival Society in 1951 and the Programme Book in 1952 set Glyndebourne on a more stable trajectory and by 1954 Moran Caplat wrote, 'George [Christie] is helping me in the office... We are in the process of forming a Trust... and so altogether I think it is fair to say that the chances of Glyndebourne continuing are pretty good'. ●

*The catalogue of the correspondence collection is available at [glyndebourne.com/opera-archive](http://glyndebourne.com/opera-archive)*

Charlie is Glyndebourne's Collections Cataloguer & Curator

# EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE

One year on from joining Glyndebourne as Technical & Production Director **Sam Garner-Gibbons** should be starting to relax, get his feet under the table. But as he runs all of the backstage departments – costume, stage, props & scenic workshop, lighting, sound & video, stage management – those feet haven't really had time to touch the ground, as he tells **Karen Anderson**.

**KA: You've run the biggest department at Glyndebourne for a year now, how has it been?**

SGG: I have to say that it is an honour and privilege to work with such an incredibly talented, professional and passionate team. Everyone's commitment to making work of the very highest quality – always – is inspirational and a joy to be part of, and I just hope I measure up! I should also say that I am loving being here. I had no plans to leave my previous job, and nowhere else was attractive to me – apart from Glyndebourne – and lo and behold here I am. It has not failed to live up to my hopes and I am very happy with my decision to join this beautiful place at the start of 2025.

**You worked at Chichester Festival Theatre for 29 years – how does live opera differ from live theatre?**

I think part of the attraction of Glyndebourne was its similarities to Chichester in some ways: a slightly mad endeavour, world-class theatre/opera in the middle of beautiful countryside, with a festival model where we bring lots of people together for a celebration of the art form... collapse in a heap afterwards and then do it all again next year! And that's before we even get to the Autumn Season.

However, what I wanted from joining Glyndebourne was something different, a new challenge, after 29 years of making theatre – and it has delivered that. Of course the scale is significantly larger – because, well, it's opera! Huge performing companies, massive orchestra, big sets. But also where the theatre community is mainly on a national level, opera is very much international. That's exciting. To be working with people who come from different cultures and collaborate on this art form.

**Can you tell us a bit about your background in theatre and how you started out?**

It all really started at school. I wasn't much of an

academic, or a sportsperson (you had to be one or the other at my school) and so I discovered the school stage. A friend and I, under the watchful eye of the science teacher, refurbished the stage systems in our spare time (and hid in a store room at breaks because playgrounds were actively hostile if you were ginger in the 80s!). And then I realised you could actually train to do this properly. I went to Central School of Speech and Drama in London and did a BTEC HND in stage management and technical theatre, and never really looked back. After training I worked in a few theatres as a lighting and sound technician, and toured for a bit with Northern Ballet as an assistant stage manager before ending up in Chichester 30 years ago as a lighting technician. Lighting was my first love in theatre if I am honest. I am always inspired by how it can transform a scene and convey so much by way of location and mood. I worked my way up to Head of Lighting there (with a few freelance projects along the way as a production manager and consultant) and then about 12 years ago I moved into technical management and left lighting behind.

**Were you more used to staging one show for a period of time, or as at Glyndebourne in rep, rotating throughout the season?**

I had both experiences at Chichester. Up to 2011 Chichester worked in rep (as did Northern Ballet previously on tour), typically with two or three shows in rotation. They didn't quite do the opera model of rehearsing a new show in a morning session and then changing over for an evening show. All shows were rehearsed in advance and then opened in swift succession followed by then running and changing them over daily. Then after the theatre was reopened after refurbishment it didn't really go back to rep and did straight runs (with occasional projects where a rep was done for a trilogy, like the Young Chekhov season, three works in rep on a single adaptable set, with a moat

of water around it – not helpful!). So for the last ten or so years I have been used to straight runs. Of course the challenge at Chichester was having two stages (now three) so you were constantly in transition between shows in one theatre or other over their festivals.

**What have you enjoyed most and found most challenging during your first year?**

I have loved being welcomed so warmly into Glyndebourne by all the team. As I am new my first year has involved a lot of fact finding and forensics – and watching and learning from everyone. I started part-time in January and it all felt very calm, then the Festival started and I still feel like my feet haven't hit the ground since. I also realise now that because we work so far ahead (3-4 years) due to artist and creative availability, that you are constantly in pre-production planning. Previously in Chichester the planning cycle was only a year to 18 months (with only a few projects in longer term development). Oh and squirrels breaking into your office are a challenge – keep the windows closed overnight and don't leave biscuits out is the learning there.

**What was your favourite opera production in 2025 and why?**

It's hard not to single out *Saul*, a treat in every single way. But really as opera is so new to me I have loved it all – every production has brought something new for me, musically and creatively.

**You have to wear evening dress for 'director duty' – was that weird at first and did you have a dinner suit before working at Glyndebourne?**

Yes! Apart from occasional events where I have had to dress up, like the Olivier awards or big fundraisers, I haven't needed a tuxedo. I am loving the dressing up to be honest and am looking forward to investing in some more design options over time so I can tailor my outfits to fit in with the productions in the future!

**Did you have any preconceptions about Glyndebourne before you started here, and have they proved to be true or false?**

I thought it would all be a bit stuffy and really for aficionados. I also felt like an interloper not coming from the world of opera – turns out there are loads of us here. What I actually found of course is that we are all here to make great work, one that creates a reaction in an audience, and that actually opera really is for everyone. There are still some who live, drink and breathe opera and speak in tongues I don't understand, but that's just like theatre specialists.



**What are you looking forward to in Festival 2026?**

There are so many exciting productions it's hard to choose. Glyndebourne's first *Tosca* with the brilliant Ted Huffman? *L'Orfeo* with William Kentridge who is such an incredible artist/collaborator? *Billy Budd*, which has the most exciting looking set I have seen so far, and which so many people have told me is amazing. Spoilt for choice I think.

Most of all I am looking forward to a Festival where I have some sense of how everything works and I can fully invest myself in leading my brilliant team, supporting them to do their best work. ●

↑ Sam Garner-Gibbons at the stage fit up for *Le nozze di Figaro*, Festival 2025



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