

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN OPERA

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Charity No. 1092649

UPSTAIRS AT THE GATEHOUSE, HIGHGATE, LONDON N6 4BD



Albert Herring

By Benjamin Britten

Libretto by Eric Crozier

Freely adapted from a short story by Guy de Maupassant

NOVEMBER 14 – NOVEMBER 23, 2015

Best Opera Production

Winner 2013

Nominated 2014

Director: Joe Austin • Designer: Maira Vazeou • Music Director: Oliver-John Ruthven

With the Hampstead Garden Opera Orchestra

'Loxford has a problem. Standards have been slipping, things ain't what they used to be, and what with young people these days... Well you wouldn't believe.

And now the May Day committee have to choose a May Queen from the dreadful selection of wayward and wicked girls in their little market town. Standards must be upheld, and none of the girls will do – but there's a suitable boy, name of Albert Herring. Will he agree? And can they keep him on the straight and narrow?

Librettist Eric Crozier's portrayal of Loxford is as biting comic as the 'Borough' of Peter Grimes is oppressively tragic. Indeed, many of the characters resemble humorous versions of some of the stuffy, hidebound inhabitants of the earlier opera. Albert himself is a socially gauche misfit who is forced to choose between remaining under his mother's thumb and exploring the delights of freedom and love. The result is a beautifully crafted, well-observed, witty and touching opera.

Join us in a celebration of small town English life around 1950, complete with busy-bodies, do-gooders, vicars, pink blancmange and naval rum as we find that all is not quite as idyllic as some would like..' Joe Austin, Director

Award-winning North London opera company Hampstead Garden Opera will present a new production of *Albert Herring* this Autumn, its first staging of a Britten opera – “One of Britten's deathless hits and perfect for the kind of company that HGO has become” (Michael White in the Ham & High, May 2014).

Albert Herring is Britten's second chamber opera, but his only comedy. After a violent fall-out with Sadlers Wells following the première of *Peter Grimes* in 1945, Britten was left with nowhere to stage his work in the immediate post-war era. His friend Eric Crozier suggested creating a chamber group comprising a small company of gifted singers, without chorus, and the smallest group of instrumentalists that Britten would accept for chamber opera. This idea took wings, and led to the formation, first, of the Glyndebourne Opera Company, and then, when that went sour after the launch of *The Rape of Lucretia* in 1946, the English Opera Group. A second chamber opera was urgently needed to keep the project alive. Crozier undertook to provide a libretto (based on a short story by Guy de Maupassant) and *Albert Herring* was completed in time for the Glyndebourne season of 1947. This time there was no

Glyndebourne tour, but Britten and Pears took the new company to Holland and Lucerne. The venture was an artistic success, but a financial disaster. 'Why do we have to come all this way to perform' said Peter Pears: 'why don't we start our own festival – in Aldeburgh?' The rest is history.

Joe Austin is returning to direct his second production for Hampstead Garden Opera. Over the last ten years he has worked in many of the UK's premier opera houses as director, associate director and assistant director. Last year he was associate director on Siegfried at Opera North, which won unanimous critical approval from the press. Joe assisted David Alden in his revival production of *Peter Grimes* at ENO in January 2014, and is steeped in Britten's musical and dramatic language.

Oliver-John Ruthven, Music Director of Hampstead Garden Opera since 2008, will conduct the ... orchestra. He is a conductor, instrumentalist and singer who has worked with companies such as The Royal Ballet, The Monteverdi Choir, Hallé Youth Choir and Riverside Opera, and is a member of the English Baroque Soloists. He has led the company in an exciting and diverse range of repertoire spanning over 400 years, from Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1609) to Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park* (2011). Oliver-John is excited to be embarking on *Albert Herring*: 'As a musical story-teller, Britten is a master, and this is typified in *Herring*. Characters are brought to life with incredible skill, making it a wonderfully engaging piece to work on'.

Hampstead Garden Opera, set up in 1990, is a semi-professional opera company based in North London which presents fully-staged new opera productions with orchestra twice a year at Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Highgate. It is highly acclaimed for the excellent standard of its productions, its demanding musical standards, and the quality of professional and amateur singers, conductors and production staff that it attracts.

Hampstead Garden Opera won the Off West End (Offies) Opera Production Award 2013 for its 2012 staging of *Così fan tutte*. HGO's production of Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park* in April 2013 was a finalist for the 2014 Offies.

"Hampstead Garden Opera at Upstairs at the Gatehouse has been proving for 22 years that you can perform with respect and honour with young professionals in a back room; for a start they take the pieces - and the old stuff like musical standards - seriously." Robert Thicknesse review of '*Così fan tutte*' for **Opera Now**.

Performances of *Albert Herring*:

Evenings – Nov 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 at 7.30 pm

Matinées at 4.00pm: Sundays Nov 16 & 23

Matinée at 2.30pm: Saturday Nov 22

Upstairs At The Gatehouse, Highgate, London N6 4BD

Tickets: (unreserved) £23 Box Office: 020 8340 3488

Online: www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com

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13th September 2014