

PRESS RELEASE



HGO PRESENTS

Partenope

An opera not-so-seria by George Frideric Handel

Libretto after Silvio Stampiglia

May 17th to 26th 2019

At Jacksons Lane Theatre, Highgate London N6 5AA

Stage Director: Ashley Pearson

Music Director: Bertie Baigent

• with the HGO Orchestra

www.hgo.org.uk/partenope

HGO, North London's leading opera company, will perform Handel's exuberant opera *Partenope* from May 17th to 26th at Jacksons Lane Theatre in Highgate.

The story of four love rivals seeking the hand of Queen Partenope, amid romantic complications and cross-dressing disguise, with its colourful and vibrant score, went unperformed for many years after its 1730 premiere, but is now recognized as a showcase of Handel's mastery.

HGO's production is set at a fantasy Victorian era seaside, at a time when the British middle classes began to enjoy holidays away from their 'real' lives and the chance to escape social convention - an era when strong social norms and taboos contrasted with the sense of boundless opportunity resulting from the might of the British Empire and the birth of consumerism.

But there is a sense from the start of the opera that we have arrived somewhere where destiny holds sway, dreams might become reality and Cupid is a force to be reckoned with. In her first aria, Partenope, here the proprietress of a leading seaside establishment, proclaims, "*Love and fate will fight for me,*" kicking off a whirlwind in which love and destiny seem to be at war.

Ashley Pearson, Production Director, says: "The great power of Handel's opera lies in his ability to convey through the music the depth of feeling of each of his characters. Every aria is grounded in feelings which are familiar to us all. Rosmira, the anti-hero, is a spurned woman who spends the entire opera dressed as a man in her plan for revenge. We can't help but root for her. Partenope is in many ways the antithesis of Rosmira, but neither woman will let themselves be ruled by men. Both female characters show greater depth, complexity and wit than their male suitors in this love hexagon."

Bertie Baigent, Music Director, comments: "Composed in 1730, it has the structure of an *opera seria* – serious as opposed to comic opera - but *Partenope's* form seems in many ways at odds with its eccentric content: indeed the libretto was deemed frivolous and vulgar when Handel initially suggested it as a possible opera subject in 1726. Its varied musical numbers are part of its triumph. The arias in *Partenope* are relatively short, there are several ensembles for more than one singer, and many wonderfully varied and evocative sequences."

Ashley Pearson

Ashley Pearson is a London-based writer and director. Her work is narrative-driven, highly visual and meticulously crafted. She specializes in opera, new work and reimagined classics. She recently wrote the libretto/adaptation for *Carmen* at the King's Head Theatre. Ashley was Associate Director of the 2017 Opera Works programme at the English National Opera. She was recently the assistant director on *Macbeth* and observing director on *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Her other assisting work includes *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (Royal College of Music), and *Don Giovanni* (Lyric Opera Studio Weimar). Ashley was an apprentice director with New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Theatre Festival and holds a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences specializing in theatre, abstract mathematics, and film studies from Quest University Canada.

Bertie Baigent

Bertie Baigent was a finalist in the 2018 Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition. His opera experience includes working as conductor, assistant conductor, piano and continuo player, répétiteur, and vocal coach. He is music director of Waterperry Opera Festival, where in 2018 he conducted *Don Giovanni*, *Mansfield Park* (Jonathan Dove) and *A Hand of Bridge* (Barber). From 2016-2018 he was chief conductor of the London Young Sinfonietta, and in 2018 he was appointed as assistant conductor to the Colorado Symphony in Denver. He has also worked with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the WDR-Sinfonieorchester, amongst others. Bertie graduated from Jesus College Cambridge (1st class Honours, Music) in 2016. In 2017 he was awarded the Ernest Read prize and the Sir Henry Wood scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music, and gained his MA there with distinction for Orchestral in 2018.

HGO, established in 1990, is North London's leading opera company. It is committed to the development of young singers, and stages two productions each year. It also seeks innovative outreach with schools and the North London community. Its consistently high musical, vocal and productions standards make HGO an important part of the artistic life of the capital. **HGO won the Off West End (Offies) Opera Production Award 2013 for its 2012 staging of *Così fan tutte***, and were finalists for the same award in the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 Offies.



Performances of *Partenope*:

Evenings at 7.30 pm – May 17,18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25

Afternoons at 4.00 pm – May 19 and 26

Jacksons Lane Theatre, Highgate, London N6 5AA

Tickets: (unreserved) £27 (Premium Seats) £22 (General Admission) (Concessions £20 – May 20-21)

Online tickets: www.hgo.org.uk/tickets

Phone box office: 0800 411 8881

For further information, please contact

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