

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN OPERA

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Charity No. 1092649

UPSTAIRS AT THE GATEHOUSE, HIGHGATE, LONDON N6 4BD



***XERXES*** By G.F.Handel

Libretto by Nicolo Minato

English Translation by Nicholas Hytner

April 24<sup>th</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Best Opera Production

Winner 2013

Finalist 2014/2015

Director: Andrew Davidson • Principal Music Director: Oliver-John Ruthven

Guest Conductor: Richard Hetherington • With Musica Poetica London

Award-winning North London opera company Hampstead Garden Opera is to present a new production of Handel's *Xerxes* in the English version by Nicholas Hytner, conducted from the keyboard by The Royal Opera's Richard Hetherington, at Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Highgate, from April 24<sup>th</sup> – May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Composed and first performed at the King's Theatre, London, in 1738, Handel's comic masterpiece *Xerxes* was one of his last operas, and very different to previous works. Anxious to provide a new style of entertainment, he discarded many of the rigid rules and long-winded nature of the Italian Opera to create a more fluid and dramatic form of entertainment. Though notionally about Xerxes, the Persian King who invaded Greece in 580 BE, it is not so much a historical work, but a love story and a comedy, focusing on the rivalry between Xerxes and his brother Arsamenes for the love of Romilda, daughter of the Persian Army Commander. HGO's Principal Music Director, Oliver-John Ruthven, describes Handel's *Xerxes* as "a superb example of music theatre, in which we find a wealth of beauty, profundity, and comedy." Within the opera we hear one of Handel's best-loved tunes (often known as *Handel's Largo*) and a wealth of other beautiful music. We will be using the Nicholas Hytner translation from his highly acclaimed ENO Production.

This will be the first time that **Richard Hetherington** has conducted a production at HGO. Richard is currently a member of the music staff at the ROH, and will be conducting The Royal Opera's *La traviata* in June. This will also be the first HGO production to be staged by Australian director, **Andrew Davidson**.

Andrew Davidson observes, "the libretto of *Xerxes* in the form adopted by Handel is a lesson in love, loyalty, and justice from one of the world's great operatic wordsmiths. It celebrates the human capacity for the sensual, the scientific, the silly, and the sublime."

Andrew sees the King's brother Arsamenes as the key character: "It can be tough living in the shadow of a big brother. It's even tougher when your big brother is a king who acts like a kid. Spending a fortune on insane building projects, or cultivating a bizarre infatuation with a plant, you can deal with. But when he steals your beloved on your wedding day, it's time to take action. Thus the true hero Arsamenes embarks on a battle of hearts in the corridors of power. Little does Xerxes know that his own fiancée is headed

*into town to tame this whiz kid run wild. Will she pull rank; reshuffle the cards and claim Xerxes for herself? Or will the dark clouds of tyranny extinguish the light? The resolution is not obvious."*

**Andrew Davidson's** work as a director ranges from classical and contemporary theatre to opera and musicals. Directing highlights include Australian premieres of works by Thomas Adès and Tony Kushner, as well as an acclaimed production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Andrew has worked extensively as a coach of actors and singers in Australia, the USA and the UK. His work has been supported by the Queen's Trust, the Helpmann Foundation, and a Nadia Boulanger Award.

**Richard Hetherington** is on the music staff of The Royal Opera and during his tenure there has conducted *Le nozze di Figaro* and *La sonnambula* and in the 2014/15 Season will be conducting *La Traviata*. He has played continuo for The Royal Opera, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. An accomplished recitalist, Hetherington has performed with such singers as Renée Fleming, Alice Coote, Juan Diego Flórez, Mark Padmore, John Tomlinson, Stefan Vinke, Eva-Maria Westbroek and Roderick Williams. His performances are regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

**Oliver-John Ruthven**, Principal Music Director of Hampstead Garden Opera, 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 since 2008 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).

**Hampstead Garden Opera**, set up in 1990, is a semi-professional opera company based in North London, 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***, and were finalists for the same award in the 2014 and 2015 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 *Xerxes*:**

**Evenings – Apr 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, May 1 & 2 at 7.30 pm**

**Matinées at 4.00pm: Sundays Apr 26 & May 3**

**Matinée at 2.30pm: Saturday May 2nd**

Upstairs At The Gatehouse, Highgate, London N6 4BD

Tickets: (unreserved) £23 (Concessions £21 - Apr 24, 25, & 26) Box Office: 020 8340 3488

Online: [www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com](http://www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com)

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1<sup>st</sup> March 2015