

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN OPERA

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Charity No. 1092649

UPSTAIRS AT THE GATEHOUSE, HIGHGATE, LONDON N6 4BD



Winner 2013

Best Opera Production

LA CALISTO

By Francesco Cavalli

Libretto by Giovanni Faustino

English translation by Anne Ridler

APRIL 25 – MAY 4, 2014

Director: Joe Austin • Designer: Tom Oldham • Music Director: Oliver-John Ruthven

With period ensemble Musica Poetica London

'In a world devastated by natural disasters, tender love and unbridled desire are notable survivors. As part of the struggle to control the planet's dwindling resources and rebuild a crumbling society, both the big guns and the little fellas are soon up to all their old games – seduction, adultery, trickery and all manner of earthy comedy familiar to readers of 21st century tabloids. The big question is, who can afford love? With music of exquisite eloquence, Cavalli gives us the answer.' Joe Austin, Director

Award-winning North London opera company **Hampstead Garden Opera** will be staging a new production of Cavalli's masterpiece *La Calisto* (1651) this spring, with an English translation by Anne Ridler. The performances are conducted by HGO's Music Director **Oliver-John Ruthven** with period ensemble **Musica Poetica London**. Director **Joe Austin**, fresh from assisting David Alden in his revival of *Peter Grimes* at ENO, introduces us to a world that is becoming increasingly familiar to us from the daily horrors of TV news bulletins and documentaries – a world reeling in chaos from disasters not a million miles from those described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on which the opera is based.

Beauty, comedy, tragedy and magic surround Ovid's heroine, Calisto, as she finds out, at her peril, that nothing should be taken at face value. Austin and his designer **Tom Oldham** take her – and us – on a journey of adventure in which she struggles to comprehend the hostile world around her, full of bawdy and louche ruffians freed from normal social constraints - characters familiar to mid-17th century Venetian audiences from classical myth and the annual carnival, and to 21st century audiences from the lads' magazines. Calisto suffers one humiliation after another – ravished with the aid of a cruel trick by Jove, chastised for her sexual feelings towards her heroine Diana, and viciously punished for a crime she did not commit by an outraged Juno. For all her pain in this life, however, she is finally promised immortality in the next.

Joe Austin is delighted to join Hampstead Garden Opera in his debut for the company. 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. He also directed a premiere of a work by the established

composer Stephen McNeff, which was performed at the Linbury Studio at the Royal Opera House. Joe recently assisted David Alden in his revival production of *Peter Grimes* at ENO.

Oliver-John Ruthven 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 been Music Director of Hampstead Garden Opera since 2008, leading the company in a range of repertoire spanning over 400 years, from Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1609) to Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park* (2011). It is this diversity of operatic output which typifies the company, making it a bold and adventurous place in which to make music. The scale may be intimate but the dramatic impact is powerful. For Cavalli's *La Calisto* he will conduct from the harpsichord, as the composer himself did for the first performances of the opera. He is excited to be returning to the world of 17th century Italian opera with his period instrument ensemble, **Musica Poetica London**, which he co-founded with a small group of outstanding young musicians from the Royal Academy in 2010. For *La Calisto*, Oliver-John will be joined by violins, viola da gamba, theorbo, recorders, triple harp and organ for what will be the ensemble's fifth collaboration with HGO.

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 *La Calisto*:

Evenings at 7.30pm: April 25, 26, 29, 30, May 1, 2 & 3

Matinées at 4.00pm: Sundays April 27 & May 4

Matinée at 2.30pm: Saturday May 3

Tickets: (unreserved) £23 (concessions £21)

Box Office: 020 8 2340 3488

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