

5 November 2018

## **SCOTTISH OPERA PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF *ANTHROPOCENE* BY STUART MACRAE AND LOUISE WELSH**

The world premiere of *Anthropocene*, a gripping new work commissioned by Scottish Opera from composer **Stuart MacRae** and librettist **Louise Welsh**, takes place on January 24 at Theatre Royal Glasgow. It then tours to King's Theatre, Edinburgh and London's Hackney Empire.

Telling the story of an expeditionary team of scientists who become trapped in the frozen Arctic wastelands, *Anthropocene* is directed by **Matthew Richardson** (*Rigoletto* 2018) and designed by **Samal Blak**, the award-winning team behind MacRae and Welsh's five-star opera *The Devil Inside* (2016).

Conducted by Scottish Opera Music Director **Stuart Stratford**, the superb ensemble cast includes former Scottish Opera Emerging Artist **Jennifer France** (*Ariadne auf Naxos* 2018), Scottish soprano **Jeni Bern** and **Stephen Gadd** (*Rigoletto* 2018.) They are joined by **Benedict Nelson** (*The Burning Fiery Furnace* 2018), **Mark Le Brocq**, **Paul Whelan**, **Anthony Gregory** and **Sarah Champion** (*Opera Highlights* 2018).

*Anthropocene* is the fourth collaboration between MacRae and Welsh, a fruitful partnership initially born of the 15-minute opera *Remembrance Day* in 2009. The composer-librettist team went on to create *Ghost Patrol* in 2012, which won a South Bank Sky Arts Award and was nominated for an Olivier Award, and 2016's *The Devil Inside*, based on a short story by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Inverness-born MacRae's work has been performed at the Royal Opera House and Edinburgh International Festival, and by ensembles including Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Hebrides Ensemble. He is currently Composer in Association at Lammermuir Festival.

A Professor of Creative Writing at University of Glasgow, Welsh is the author of a number of popular novels including award-winning *The Cutting Room* and *Plague Times Trilogy*.

Composer **Stuart MacRae** said: 'The triumph of human self-interest over nature and over other humans: this is the essence of the Anthropocene age. It is also the cause of man-made climate change, countless environmental catastrophes and the exploitation of marginalised peoples by wealthy nations and individuals. When faced with extreme isolation, a loss of control over their destiny, and personal catastrophe, the appearance of a mysterious outsider poses an impossible dilemma for the crew of the *Anthropocene*, and becomes the focus of temptation, sympathy, ambition, empathy and fascination.'

'It's been a joy to work on *Anthropocene* with librettist Louise Welsh, who brings such depth, colour and variety to this original story, and I'm delighted that it will be brought to the stage by our hugely imaginative long-term collaborators, Matthew Richardson and Samal Blak, and conducted by Stuart Stratford.'

Librettist **Louise Welsh** said: '*Anthropocene* is one of the most exciting projects I have been involved with. This is my fourth opera with Stuart MacRae for Scottish Opera and it is an honour to write words which I know he will set to a unique palette of music.'

'The themes of *Anthropocene* are both perennial and up-to-the-minute. Human beings have always striven to conquer distant and hostile territories. The twenty-first century has opened the field to rich amateurs who might previously have stayed at home and charted on maps the progress of expeditions they had funded. *Anthropocene* is a story of over-wielding ambition, murder, human sacrifice and thwarted love. It is also an exploration of the tensions between magic and science.'

**Stuart Stratford**, Scottish Opera Music Director said: 'Stuart MacRae and Louise Welsh have yet again delivered an amazing piece of music theatre for Scottish Opera. An incredibly imaginative story of discovery, betrayal and violent sacrifice with daring and dazzling virtuoso orchestral textures, *Anthropocene* will keep the audience gripped throughout.'

Those who wish to discover more about how the production was created can attend Pre-show Talks, and audience members with a visual impairment can enjoy the full opera experience at audio-described performances, which have a live commentary describing the action on stage without compromising the music.

*Anthropocene* is supported by John S. Cohen Foundation, RW Trust and Scottish Opera's New Commissions Circle.

## Cast List

Ice	<b>Jennifer France</b>
Professor Prentice	<b>Jeni Bern</b>
Charles	<b>Stephen Gadd</b>
Miles	<b>Benedict Nelson</b>
Harry King	<b>Mark Le Brocq</b>
Captain Ross	<b>Paul Whelan</b>
Vasco	<b>Anthony Gregory</b>
Daisy	<b>Sarah Champion</b>

## Creative Team

Conductor	<b>Stuart Stratford</b>
Director	<b>Matthew Richardson</b>
Set and Costume Designer	<b>Samal Blak</b>
Lighting Designer	<b>Matthew Richardson</b>
Movement Director	<b>Kally Lloyd-Jones</b>
Associate Lighting Director	<b>Zoe Spurr</b>

## Performance Diary

### **Theatre Royal Glasgow, 282 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 3QA**

Thu 24 Jan, 7.15pm

Sat 26 Jan, 7.15pm

Pre-show Talk	Sat 26 Jan, 6pm
Touch Tour	Sat 26 Jan, 6pm
Audio-described performance	Sat 26 Jan, 7.15pm

### **King's Theatre Edinburgh, 2 Leven Street, Edinburgh, EH3 9LQ**

Thu 31 Jan, 7.15pm

Sat 2 Feb, 7.15pm

Pre-show Talk	Sat 2 Feb, 6pm
Touch Tour	Sat 2 Feb, 6pm
Audio-described performance	Sat 2 Feb, 7.15pm

### **Hackney Empire, 291 Mare Street, London, E81 1EJ**

Thu 7 Feb, 7.30pm

Sat 9 Feb, 7.30pm

London performances are presented in association with The Royal Opera

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### Notes to Editors

#### **Stuart MacRae**

Born in Inverness in 1976, Stuart MacRae has established himself as one of the most distinctive composers working today, writing music of elemental power and emotional subtlety. Equally at home writing opera, orchestral music, chamber music and music for choirs, his work takes listeners on a journey through perceptions of nature, striking imagery and the landscape of human emotion.

His numerous stage works range from *Echo and Narcissus*, a dance-opera premiered at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 2007, through to 2015's critically acclaimed *The Devil Inside* for Scottish Opera and Music Theatre Wales. *Ghost Patrol*, written in collaboration with writer Louise Welsh, won the 2013 South Bank Sky Arts Award for Opera and was shortlisted for an Olivier Award.

From 1999-2003, he was Composer in Association at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and his works have been performed throughout Europe with groups including Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Hungarian Radio Symphony, BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Scottish Ensemble, Hebrides Ensemble and Britten Sinfonia, by conductors including Martyn Brabbins, Oliver Knussen, Jan-Latham Koenig, Susanna Malkki, David Robertson, Clark Rundell, Donald Runnicles, John Storgårds and Ilan Volkov.

Numerous of his works have been performed at the Edinburgh International Festival and BBC Proms, including his 2001 Violin Concerto which had its world premiere at the BBC Proms and has been performed by Tasmin Little, Christian Tetzlaff and Tedi Papavrami.

His music has been recorded for NMC, Black Box, Delphian, Kairos and the London Sinfonietta's own label. Recent works include *Cantata* (2016) for the Choir of Gonville and Caius College Cambridge, *Piano Sonata No.2* (2016) for Simon Smith, and *Sunrises* (2017) for the Gould Piano Trio. From 2017, he is Composer in Residence at the Lammermuir Festival, where he premiered his newest commission in September 2018.

#### **Louise Welsh**

Louise Welsh works in several forms including novels, short stories, opera libretti, radio, performance and sound art. She has written eight novels, most recently Plague Times Trilogy, a series of books exploring a

contemporary pandemic. She has written many short stories and articles and is editor of 'Ghost, One Hundred Stories to Read with the Lights On' (2016).

Louise has collaborated on four operas with the composer Stuart MacRae. She wrote the libretto for the opera *Ghost Patrol*, a co-production between Scottish Opera and Music Theatre Wales, which premiered at 2012's Edinburgh Festival. The production won a Southbank Sky Arts Award and was shortlisted for an Olivier Award. She collaborated again with MacRae on *The Devil Inside*, an opera inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's short story *The Bottle Imp*. The opera toured Britain in 2016 and had its Canadian premiere in Toronto with Tapestry Opera.

Louise was writer in residence for The University of Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art from November 2010 to April 2012. She has received several awards and international fellowships, including a Doctor of Arts from Edinburgh Napier University and an honorary fellowship from the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. She was a University of Otago Scottish Writers' Fellow at Pah Homestead, New Zealand (2016).

Louise was co-founder and director of the Empire Café (with Jude Barber of Collective Architecture), an award winning, multi-disciplinary exploration of Scotland's relationship with the North Atlantic slave trade. The project was included in the City of Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme. It involved thirty-six events over nine days and attracted in the region of four thousand visitors.

A frequent broadcaster, she has written and presented radio features on many topics including Scottish history, gothic, Robert Louis Stevenson and contemporary art.

Louise's first novel *The Cutting Room* is shortlisted for the most inspiring winner of the Saltire First Book of the Year in the award's 30-year history.

Louise is Professor of Creative Writing at University of Glasgow @louisewelsh00

### **Scottish Opera**

Scottish Opera is Scotland's national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland. It was founded by Alexander Gibson in 1962 and was inaugurated with a production of *Madama Butterfly* at the King's Theatre in Glasgow.

Notable achievements include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Inés de Castro* at the 1996 Edinburgh International Festival; complete Ring cycles at the 2003 Edinburgh International Festival, which won the 2004 South Bank Show Award for Best Opera Production; and the Achievement in Opera Award at the 2017 UK Theatre Awards for Sir David McVicar's production of Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Recent commissions include *Five:15 Operas Made in Scotland* (2008-10); *The Lady from the Sea*; *Clemency*; the double bill of *In the Locked Room* and *Ghost Patrol* (winner of a South Bank Sky Arts Award) which premiered at the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival and 2016's *The Devil Inside* by Stuart MacRae and Louise Welsh. Earlier this year the Company made its US debut with *Bambino* at the

Metropolitan Opera New York, and returns to the city's Brooklyn Academy of Music with *Greek* in December.

Scottish Opera is committed to bringing the widest possible range of opera, performed to the highest possible standards, to the maximum audience throughout Scotland and the UK. Each year it performs in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness, as well as smaller theatres, village halls and community centres throughout the country.

Scottish Opera's Education and Outreach Department was the first of its kind of any opera company in Europe. It operates an extensive programme which involves over 8,000 primary school children every year as well as many other activities including adult learning and *Unwrapped* taster sessions.

Scottish Opera is supported by the Scottish Government.



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