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##### **Press Release**

**Scottish Opera celebrates 50 years of pioneering**

**Outreach and Education work**

* **In the 50th anniversary year of its Outreach and Education programme, Scottish Opera announces new projects to connect with communities across Scotland**
* **A package of digital initiatives for primary school children marks the first time the Company has offered projects to all Primary 1 to 7 ages simultaneously**
* **Scottish Opera Young Company returns for its first live performances since the pandemic with a new production by Roxana Haines of Kurt Weill’s *The Tsar Has His Photograph Taken* on 31 July & 1 Augustand the world premiere in 2022 of *Rubble* by composer Gareth Williams and writer/director Johnny McKnight, specially commissioned for the department’s milestone anniversary**
* **In a development of its *Breath Cycle* project,the Company begins work on a new initiative to create a song collection for and by people affected by Covid-19**
* **Further projects to focus on health and wellbeing with plans also underway to engage children with the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow**

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of its ground-breaking Outreach and Education programme department, Scottish Opera has announced further projects to bring music and performance into the lives of people across the country. From digital initiatives for primary schools and a new production from the Scottish Opera Young Company, to breathing exercises for people recovering from the effects of Covid-19, the projects build on Scottish Opera’s pioneering work over the past five decades and its ongoing engagement with communities throughout the pandemic and beyond.

The first of its kind and oldest outreach and education unit of any opera company in Europe, the department was formed in 1971 under the leadership of Scottish Opera’s founder Sir Alexander Gibson. Its ethos is to break down barriers to the artform, connect communities and inspire people from all backgrounds through opera. A trailblazer in community arts engagement across Scotland and internationally, it has played a seminal role in the educational experiences of generations of Scottish people and has developed into a year-round programme of youth and community projects. From its renowned Primary Schools Tour – which has now engaged over half a million children in the arts across all 32 Scottish local authority areas, and working with 9,000 pupils from over 130 schools every year – to its innovative operas for infants and ground-breaking work with people living with dementia, it creates meaningful and transformative experiences for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

In the department’s 50th year, as the world continues to navigate the unprecedented and critical impact of the pandemic, it will for the first time offer a package of projects for Primary 1 to 7 simultaneously, giving schools the opportunity to engage all pupils in a Scottish Opera primary schools project at the same time. A cross-curricular and interdisciplinary digital project for Primary 1 to 3, [**The Brassketeers**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/opera-for-schools/the-brassketeers/) introduces children to brass instruments whilst also supporting delivery of the Early and First Level numeracy curriculum. Resources include an animated short film performed by members of The Orchestra of Scottish Opera, alongside lesson plans, slide shows, worksheets and games which explore the relationship between music and maths. Aimed at Primary 3 to 4 pupils, digital storybook project [**Tiny Chef**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/opera-for-schools/tiny-chef/)introduces Mandarin language skills alongside concepts of food preparation and healthy eating. Created in collaboration with the Confucius Institute for Scotland's Schools, over several weeks the Company worked with children to develop musical, artistic and narrative ideas which were developed by a composer, librettist and illustrator into the digital storybook, which is now available online. For older children, digital performance project [**The Last Aliens**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/opera-for-schools/the-last-aliens/) invites Primary 5 to 7 pupils on an intergalactic adventure to save Planet Earth and engage with the topic of climate change as Scotland prepares to host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) later this year. With an opera of five songs for pupils to learn, teachers will be given a set of lesson plans, audio guides and demonstration films to explore the main topics, and teach music and movement, along with ideas for making props and costumes. There are also plans for digital collaborations with schools internationally and *The Last Aliens* live tour in the Autumn, should visiting groups to schools be allowed under Scottish Government Covid-19 guidelines. Digital resources for the projects are available on the Scottish Opera website and are free to all until January 2022.

Continuing its engagement with primary schools and in its role as the first Scottish partner of **Disney Musicals in Schools**, Scottish Opera will resume its work with five primary schools, each of whom will produce its own Disney KIDS musical over the next two years. Workshops will take place online from 10 May. The Company will also contribute to **the Scottish Book Trust’s pilot scheme for schools,** **Arts Alive, with a project called Song Squad** mentoring primary school aged singers and songwriters to create, perform and record a set of their own songs to reflect on issues that are important to them, their school and their community.

Meanwhile, Scottish Opera’s work with older pupils in secondary schools includes the creation of resources relating to a sequence of filmed scenes in three contrasting stagings, directed by Roxana Haines, of **Donizetti’s L'elisir d'amore** as part of the Scottish Opera: On Screen collection. Available to schools in Spring 2022, the resources will encourage critical analysis from secondary school pupils studying Music, Art & Design and Theatre Studies.

Outside the digital classroom, Scottish Opera remains dedicated to supporting emerging talent in Scotland and providing aspiring singers and stage managers with a unique and practical introduction to the world of opera through its **Scottish Opera Young Company (SOYC)**. In this 50th anniversary year, the latest cohort of the youth talent training and performance programme will perform a new production by Roxana Haines of Kurt Weill’s *The Tsar Has His Photograph Taken*, marking the first time the Young Company has been back on stage since April 2019. Rehearsals are underway via Zoom and will culminate in outdoor performances in the car park of the Company’s Edington Street Production Studios in Glasgow on 31 July and 1 August. The Young Company will also give the world premiere in 2022 of *Rubble*, a new work by composer Gareth Williams and Scottish theatre legend Johnny McKnight, commissioned for the department’s milestone anniversary.

A leading advocate of the contribution arts can make to health and wellbeing, Scottish Opera staged the UK’s first ever dementia friendly opera performance in 2016 and continues to work closely with people living with dementia. Its community-based music and dementia project [**Memory Spinners**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/memory-spinners/)hopes to reinstate its weekly group meetings in Glasgow in Spring 2022 and dementia friendly performances will also return, when Scottish Government guidelines allow, to run alongside full-length performances in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, presenting fully-staged shortened versions of productions specially created to provide a more relaxed opera experience. As an interim support for people suffering the effects of Covid-19, the Company has repurposed its [**Breath Cycle project**](http://www.breathcycle.co.uk/)– originally created in partnership with Gartnavel General Hospital respiratory ward and patients with Cystic Fibrosis – to offer free singing tutorials designed to assist with breath control. Materials and further information can be found [here](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/breath-cycle/). In a further advancement of Breath Cycle, a team of artists has now begun developmental work on a new project which will culminate in the creation of a song collection for and by people affected by Covid-19. Combining singing and breath control techniques, song writing workshops for members of the public will take place in the Autumn culminating in a presentation of the project in Summer 2022.

The impact of music and creative expression on health and wellbeing will continue to be explored by the Company in a new community exhibition project with The Abbotsford Trust, Live Borders! & East Lothian Council Arts. As part of the Sir Walter Scott 250 celebrations in 2021-22 and inspired by the title character in Donizetti’s opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*, itself based on Sir Walter Scott’s novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, **Sweet Sounds in Wild Places** will explore loneliness, isolation and lack of empowerment, as well as the impact, for good or bad, that landscape and environment can have on mental health and wellbeing. The project will run from Autumn 2021.

All of these initiatives build on the work Scottish Opera has done over the past year to continue connecting with communities, adapting its projects for the digital world and offering positive musical experiences and support for those suffering from the impact of the pandemic. Updated and modified for online participation in response to lockdown, [**Fever!**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/opera-for-schools/fever-online/), a much-loved former Primary Schools Tour production, explores topical themes of virology and microbiology. It became Scottish Opera’s first online opera for children, initially made available to Scottish schools, with accompanying teaching resources, before attracting international participants from more than 60 different countries and later culminating in a nationwide virtual performance. For toddlers, the company’s popular [**Fox-tot!**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/shows/fox-tot/) which uses a mix of music and puppetry was also reproduced for online during lockdown, offering a collection of games, music, choreography and simple sign language lessons. From early years through to projects for adults, the Company provides life-long learning for all ages and its [**Community Choir**](https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/join-in/community-choir/)has continued to meet online via Zoom throughout the pandemic, giving people of all ages the chance to come together every week to perform a mix of opera, classical, popular, folk and world music.

Scottish Opera continues to reach communities right across Scotland with its renowned **Pop-up Opera** roadshow which travels across the country to bring opera to local communities in a specially adapted trailer. Its critically acclaimed Summer 2020 tour marked an important milestone for the Company as it became Scotland’s first national performing arts company to stage performances for a live audience following the first lockdown. For its 2021 tour it will condense five Gilbert & Sullivan shows – The Pirates of Penzance, The Gondoliers, The Mikado, HMS Pinafore and Iolanthe – into re-written 25 minute performances, with plans in place for the roadshow to begin by 8 June subject to Scottish Government guidelines, to audiences of over 12,000. The final leg of the tour, running throughout September, will offer a double bill of shows including the Pirates of Penzance and a revival of A Little Bit of Bubble McBea. Aimed at children in Primary 1 to 3, Bubble McBea deals with environmental issues in the coasts around Scotland, and will raise awareness of sea pollution in the run up to the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow.

The Company hopes to build on the digital developments it has made during the pandemic and the potential this offers to engage with more schools and communities. It has become a Challenge Holder in the **Creative Informatics Challenge (CIC)**, run by the University of Edinburgh which aims to develop a new and interactive approach for evaluating the Company’s work in primary schools. Further details will be announced in the coming months.

Scottish Opera’s Director of Outreach and Education, **Jane Davidson**, who has worked with the department since 1984, said: “Since 1971, Scottish Opera has remained committed to its mission of engaging and enriching the lives of people from all corners of Scotland through opera. In these uncertain and difficult times, never has this commitment been so crucial and the need for positive and supportive musical experiences been as vital. We are incredibly proud and excited to be at the start of the journey to bring live music back to the Scottish audiences of all ages. While the opportunities for digital interaction with our work continues to evolve and develop, it’s the combination of passion and sheer joy for sharing stories through music, that will continue to drive us for the next 50 years.”

For information about Scottish Opera’s Outreach and Education programme visit <https://www.scottishopera.org.uk/>. Further announcements including the return of in person workshops will be made in the coming months.

**Notes to Editors**

Scottish Opera is Scotland’s national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland.

The Company's performance repertoire ranges across five centuries, from the earliest operas to newly-commissioned world premieres, working in collaboration with the world's finest singers and creatives, alongside The Orchestra of Scottish Opera and choruses. Recent accolades include a South Bank Sky Arts Award, a Scottish Award for New Music, Sunday Herald Culture Awards and a Herald Angel, as well as a 2020 RPS Award nomination.

Scottish Opera's work caters for audiences of all ages – ranging from babies to people living with dementia – and our Young Company and Emerging Artist programme support the talent of the future.

The Company tours extensively across Scotland, from the largest-scale theatres to rural venues with a capacity as low as 22, to ensure we are within reach of as many of our country's very dispersed population as possible. A miniature mobile opera house – literally, opera performed inside a converted 40-foot-long trailer on the back of a lorry – brings ‘Pop-up Opera’ performances to thousands of people each year in a range of inspiring and unexpected community locations. This represents the most extensive touring programme of any opera company in Europe and is a much-valued contribution to Scotland’s cultural and artistic life, particularly in remote and island communities.

The Company’s Education and Outreach programme, which celebrates 50 years in 2021, includes an annual Primary Schools Tour, bringing upper primary-aged children the opportunity to perform their own specially-commissioned piece, alongside three professional singers. Around 120 schools and 9,000 pupils take part each year.

Scottish Opera aims to be inclusive and affordable through availability of free and cheap tickets, as well as access performances including audio description, and performances which cater to those living with Dementia.

In the year to 31 March 2020, 116,960 people experienced Scottish Opera as audience members or as participants, across all of Scotland’s 32 Local Authority areas:

• 56 mainstage opera performances in Scotland plus tours to Belfast, London and Australia

• 8% of ticket buyers for mainstage opera performances in Scotland aged under 26

• 2,422 people watched specially-created opera productions for babies or toddlers

• 40,177 people participated in school’s workshops and performances

• 1,123 people living with Dementia participated in projects.

Scottish Opera is core funded by The Scottish Government

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