



PRESS RELEASE

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SCOTTISH OPERA YOUNG COMPANY PERFORMS IMMERSIVE DOUBLE BILL THIS JULY

Scottish Opera Young Company is going on tour this summer with an immersive double bill of Henry McPherson's *Maud* and Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley*. Opening on 27 July at Scottish Opera Production Studios in Glasgow, the show then tours to Barrfields Theatre in Largs and Stirling's Albert Halls.

Aged 17 to 21, the members of the Company rehearse throughout the year with Artistic Director **Chris Gray**, who also conducts, to present this thought-provoking production, which moves between centuries. The operas, directed by **Flora Emily Thomson** (*As The Seasons Turn* 2022), are connected by a single Hebridean-inspired set, designed by **Finlay McLay**, that transforms before the audience's eyes.

Maud, by composer, improviser and teacher, **Henry McPherson**, is a modern retelling of a traditional folk tale. It received its premiere in 2018 at Glasgow's SWG3 as a winner of Scottish Opera's Opera Sparks competition. Set in midsummer, it tells the story of a child who stumbles upon a tiny creature in the undergrowth while picking blackberries in an ancient wood. Taking her new-found treasure home, however, not everyone shares her love.

It is performed alongside composer **Kurt Weill's** and librettist **Arnold Sundgaard's** magical *Down in the Valley*, a bittersweet coming-of-age tale showing the light and darkness of one claustrophobic community. In another time, two young adults in an isolated religious village have fallen in love against their elder's wishes – and the girl disobeys her mother to go dancing with the boy. When a horrible accident changes their lives forever, they have one night to reckon with their fates.

Scottish Opera Young Company offers young singers a unique and practical introduction to the world of opera and the chance to develop their talent through a year-long programme, working with a range of music professionals. For many of the singers, it is the first step towards building a career in the arts, and gives them the opportunity to perform music written especially for young voices.

Jane Davidson MBE, Scottish Opera's Director of Outreach and Education said: 'We are delighted to be staging Henry McPherson's *Maud* once again following its success as part of our Opera Sparks competition in 2018. It is complemented by Kurt Weill's menacing folk-inspired opera, *Down in the Valley*, and promises to be an unmissable night. Scottish Opera Young Company stunned audiences with their moving performances of *Rubble* last summer, and have been working incredibly hard to bring these two stories to life.'

Chris Gray, Young Company Artistic Director said: 'The two pieces musically couldn't be more different. Many people hear Weill and think of his more complex modernistic musical style of *The Tsar Has His Photograph Taken* (performed by SOYC in 2021) – a much edgier world than the sweeping melodies and jazzy harmonies of *Down in the Valley*, one of his late and glorious American works. *Maud* is the entire opposite – angular, difficult, dissonant, and angsty. The young people have already commented that they can trust their instincts for *Down in the Valley*, but in *Maud* everything needs to be thought about, prepared impeccably and executed with real precision. It's a big transition, and they're dealing with it so well.'

Director **Flora Emily Thomson** said: 'Both pieces take place on a wild and rugged Hebridean-inspired island, where the community is both your only hope for, and your biggest threat to, survival. Everyone knows everyone and everything too — step out of line and you'll know it.'

'*Maud*, with its heightened and more vibrant approach, marks the origin of human dominance on the island, whilst *Down in the Valley's* romantic composition is balanced by

the darkness of a land that is barely reaping what is sown, and the psychological toil this has on a community pushed to the brink. Each piece spotlights how a single action can have rippling consequences, and how easy it is for mob mentalities to take over when a community's way of life feels in danger. Our design's fluidity means that the audience should expect to be immersed and engulfed into the world of each piece, becoming shadows of the woods and communities that inhabit the island.'

Composer **Henry McPherson** said: 'I'm thrilled *Maud* is being staged again. I'm excited to see its new incarnation with a new orchestration and a new group of talented young musicians, and can't wait to see how they bring the dragon to life! The story of Maud comes from Mordiford, a village near where I grew up in Herefordshire. Legend has it that a fearsome dragon once resided in the woods above the village, and wreaked havoc on the townsfolk, killing livestock and terrifying the children. However, legends about monsters are often very one-sided, and in my version of Maud, the main character befriends the dragon, and puts her own body between it and the angry village mob. Whether the dragon really is the evil that it is made out to be, we're never sure. '

Maud and *Down in the Valley* are supported by **Scottish Opera's New Commissions Circle, Scottish Opera's Education Angels, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust, Rowena Goffin Charitable Trust, Leverhulme Trust, Jennie S Gordon Memorial Trust and Professor Richard Rose.**

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Creative team

Conductor **Chris Gray**

Director **Flora Emily Thomson**

Set and Costume Designer **Finlay McLay**

2nd Women

Martha Brown

Performances

Scottish Opera Production Studios, Glasgow

27 & 28 July 2023, 6pm

Barrfields Theatre – Vikingar!, Largs

29 July 2023, 6pm

Albert Halls, Stirling

30 July 2023, 6pm

Notes to Editors

Henry McPherson biography

Henry McPherson is a musician and artist working across composition, improvisation, and pedagogical practices. His creative portfolio includes sound and music for concert, stage, and broadcast, site-specific pieces and gallery installation, experimental improvisation performance in sound and movement, and collaborative intermedia and hybrid-digital art pieces. His work has been shown internationally across diverse settings – from concert halls to galleries, from bathrooms to dance studios, from parks and warehouses to cafes, virtual halls and radio. Originally from Herefordshire, in the Welsh Marches, Henry maintains an affinity for natural environments and agricultural landscapes. Many of his compositions – including *Maud* (2017), commissioned by Scottish Opera – explore personal relationships to the green world via folklore and interspecies storytelling, as well as tensions between increasingly urbanised infrastructure and precarious local ecosystems, between human and more-than-human communities. He currently lives in East Lancashire, working between composing, teaching, performing, and lecturing.

Scottish Opera

Scottish Opera is Scotland's national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland. The Company was founded in 1962 by Sir Alexander Gibson with

the goal 'to lay the treasures of opera at the feet of the people of Scotland', opening with performances of *Madama Butterfly* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The 2022/23 season marked its 60th Anniversary.

Scottish Opera's performance repertoire ranges across five centuries, from the earliest operas to newly commissioned world premieres, balancing favourites with under-explored works. The Company collaborates with the world's finest singers and creatives, together with The Orchestra of Scottish Opera and choruses for each opera. Recent accolades include a South Bank Sky Arts Award, a Scottish Award for New Music, Sunday Herald Culture Awards, a 2017 UK Theatre Award, and a 2020 RPS Award. The Company took operas to Brooklyn in 2017 and Adelaide in 2020, and the 2022/23 season saw productions first staged at Scottish Opera appearing in Santa Fe, Madrid, Toulouse, and Los Angeles. The 60th Anniversary Season included the UK fully staged premiere of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* and the Company premiere of Puccini's *Il trittico*.

The Company tours extensively across Scotland to ensure performances are within reach of as many of the country's dispersed population as possible. This is one of the most extensive touring programmes of any European opera company and a much-valued contribution to Scotland's cultural and artistic life, particularly in remote and island communities.

The Company's Education & Outreach programme, the oldest in Europe, includes an annual in-person and digital Primary Schools Tour, bringing children the opportunity to perform their own specially commissioned piece alongside 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 performances offering audio description and specially-devised shorter Access performances.

Scottish Opera is committed to making opera for all, presenting opera at the highest possible standards in theatres across the country, outdoors on tour, and digital audiences around the world. The Company's 2021 production of *The Gondoliers*, filmed live at Festival Theatre Edinburgh, is available on BBC iPlayer. Scottish Opera's On Screen productions are available to watch at www.scottishopera.org.uk/what-s-on/opera-on-screen. The collection includes Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Menotti's *The Telephone*, *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*, *Mister MacNeep Has Lost His Sheep*, and Samuel Bordoli and Jenni Fagan's *The Narcissistic Fish*.

Renowned for their flexibility and craftsmanship, Scottish Opera productions are frequently presented by opera houses across the globe. Two of our 60th Anniversary productions are presented by Welsh National Opera: Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* is in Cardiff, Llandudno,

Bristol, Plymouth, Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Southampton from September to November 2023. Puccini's *Il trittico* can be seen in Cardiff in June 2024.

Following on from a run at the Opera Comique in Paris, Detroit Opera perform our 2019 production of Missy Mazzoli's *Breaking the Waves* in April 2024 (having just presented *Ainadamar*). In addition, our 2014 production of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* is performed twice in Canada: at Vancouver Opera in February 2024, and at Canadian Opera Company in Toronto in April and May 2024.

For additional press details please contact:

Emily Henderson, Press Manager, 0141 242 0511, emily.henderson@scottishopera.org.uk

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