

GLYNDEBOURNE

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90th Anniversary

90 CELEBRATING  
90 YEARS OF  
GLYNDEBOURNE



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## Recit Issue 3, January 2024

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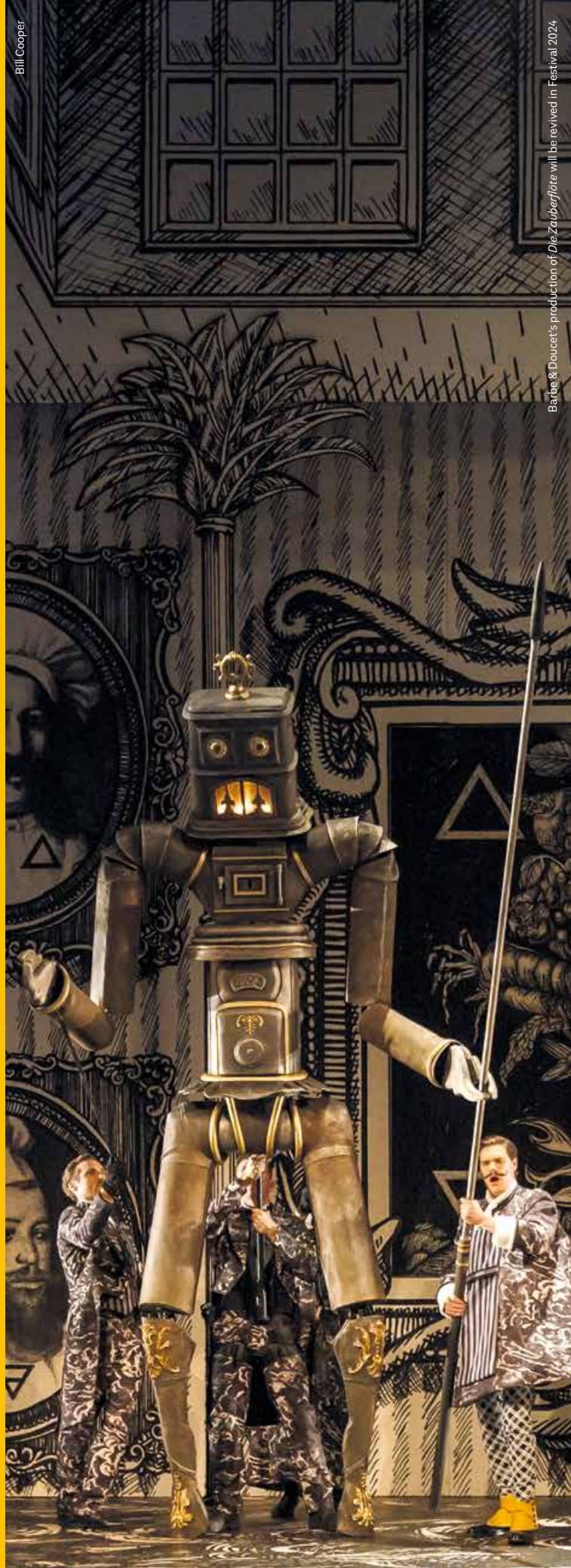


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Bill Cooper



Barbe & Doucet's production of *Die Zauberflöte* will be revived in Festival 2024

# The sun also rises

Garnering a culture of possibility, enthusiasm and collaboration, we find **Richard Davidson-Houston** one year into his new job as managing director, happily leading Glyndebourne through what was widely considered to be a ‘difficult year for opera’.

Not long ago we got some stick from a despondent journalist, wondering if Festival 2024, with its five productions instead of the usual six, is a portent of things to come. It is not. Our Festivals are years in the making, which means that 2024 was planned mid-pandemic, and with an inevitable dose of caution. Knowing what we know now, would we go back in time and reinstate the sixth production, if we could? Categorically, yes. We will immediately return to six productions in 2025 and beyond.

To those who like to say opera is declining – or worse – I say: not here it isn’t.

2023 saw the highest level of paid-attendance to performances at Glyndebourne in more than a decade. This is not a typo. Though operating budgets have been flailed by inflation, the direction of travel is emphatically positive.

One of the privileges of this job is to be able to call on people for their advice and insight, because they, like me, want to see

Glyndebourne flourish. An eminent, retired opera house CEO told me that he spent the first weeks of his tenure shaking hands and listening... and that he never stopped. In my own way I have been doing the same thing. There are nearly 30 different teams here – and I make it my business to meet with each of them regularly during the year, to find out what’s on people’s minds.

In any business it’s important to involve the people who run the day-to-day in the planning and steering into the future. A great thing about Glyndebourne is that our people care so much. There’s no avoiding the fact, though, that the last few years have been some of the most challenging most of us have lived through, personally and professionally. Now, for the company, there is a new challenge. We need to break out of the defensive position we were all forced to adopt. How? By instilling a culture of possibility and creating the conditions in which to gather momentum and to grow.

It is my intention to create the opportunity for everyone at Glyndebourne – whatever their role – to do the best work of their



Graham Carlrow

Glyndebourne staff are skilled and passionate about their work



lives. This means directing people's passions into productive discussion and collaboration, into taking risks and being supported in taking them. Thankfully we are blessed with the scale of business that means we can keep things personal, individual – and avoid the inauthenticity that can dog big corporations' stabs at renewal.

I want everyone here to feel a personal connection with their work, to know that their individual contribution is noticed and that, should they fail in a sincere attempt at doing something new, they will be supported and not criticised. It is partly through building a positive culture like this that we will be able to work together to maintain Glyndebourne's reputation as one of only a very few cultural wonders of the world.

Happily, the horizon is brightening. Barring ongoing economic headaches, Glyndebourne is in good shape.

I say happily because 2023 really was a tough year for opera in general. The headlines were once again dominated by negative stories. The after-effects of swingeing public funding cuts hung darkly over the sector and there remains serious cause for concern as to their long-term impact. However, these clouds obscured sunnier news at Glyndebourne. We saw a return to Festival

audience sizes last seen in 2018 and enjoyed a 97% occupancy in both the Festival and the expanded Autumn season. For the first time ever, we added performances 'by popular demand'.


Now what? With our operating expenses up due to inflation, I want to try to avoid passing increased costs straight on to you via raised ticket prices or by adding to the cost of your visits in other ways. In fact I'd prefer to do the opposite and in so doing lower the real and perceived barriers to more people choosing to come to Glyndebourne more often. Our goal will therefore be, carefully, to increase the number of performances, and to grow the Autumn season too. As you'd expect from an opera company, we want as many people as possible to experience opera. Increasing demand and volume will help stabilise the finances for the long term. To the same end, we will also be seeking increased donations from those who are in a position to help; making an even more motivating case for support for what we exist to do.

This year marks 90 years since the dawn of the Glyndebourne Festival. A reminder that all of us are but a part of something far bigger than ourselves. On behalf of the whole company – sincere thanks for your attendance and support.

**Richard Davidson-Houston** is Glyndebourne's Managing Director



The gardening team, December 2023

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a long, flowing white dress with a thin pink sash, stands with her arms outstretched and head tilted back, looking upwards. She is positioned against a dark background. The dress has a V-neckline and a full skirt. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman and her dress against the dark background.

**‘2023 saw the highest  
level of paid-attendance  
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Glyndebourne in more  
than a decade.  
This is not a typo.’**

# Circling back to the mothership

**Stephen Langridge** looks back at some pivotal early work for Glyndebourne that helped shape his artistic career and shares his optimism for the ways in which opera can enhance our shared experiences today.

Over the autumn I had a flashback. I went into the theatre to watch the first of our Performances for Schools: *L'elisir d'amore*, packed with 9–13 year olds. That sound! Over a thousand excited children gabbling away (I sampled it and WhatsApp-ed it to colleagues), and then the focussed silence, gasps and laughter during the performances whizzed me back to 1989, and my first ever job for Glyndebourne – presenting *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Barber of Seville* onstage, in the old house, in the Kent and East Sussex Schools' week, having spent several weeks visiting schools and running workshops. Looking back in the archive, I see that Gerald Finley was singing a very small role – Fiorello – in *Barber*. I also interviewed Helen McCarthy in front of the curtain after the interval (see page 12) – back then she was a stage manager and is now our director of development – and she told the audience about her job backstage.

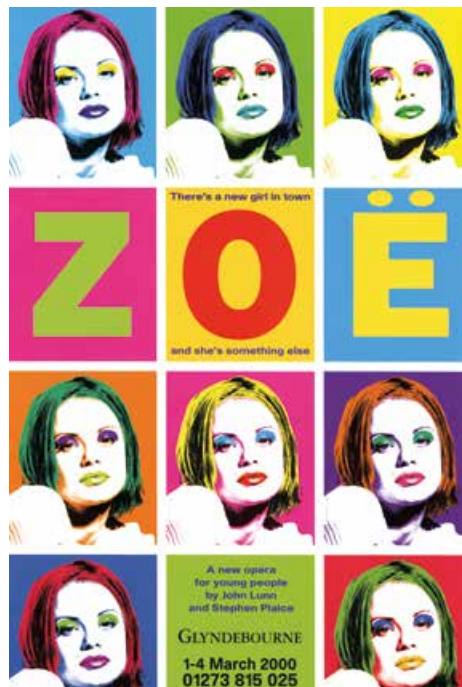
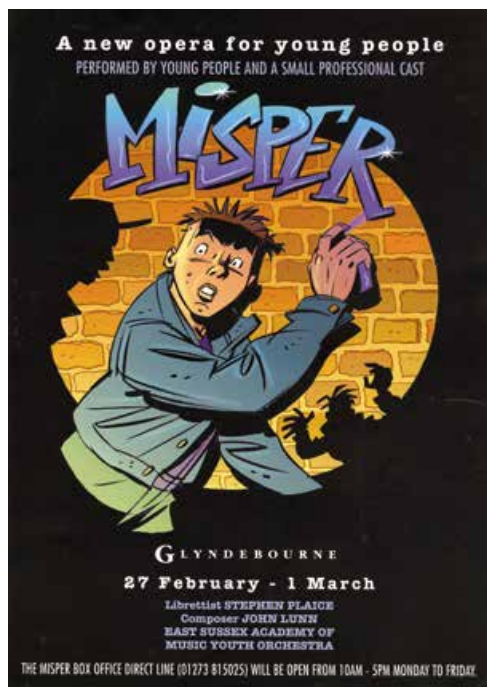
There's something in Glyndebourne's DNA that encourages development and growth within the company and celebrates the success of people who've been at Glyndebourne – even when they are being celebrated elsewhere. We feel proud of Gerry Finley's Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*, because it was magnificent, but also because he sang in our Chorus and began with small roles on the Tour.

Like many across the opera world, I am a product of that developmental way of thinking. Glyndebourne trusted me with many opportunities, and consequently, became a major part of my creative life for about 15 years, giving me experiences that have shaped my artistic and communication skills, and socio-cultural beliefs. So even though I had never worked in the Festival, taking up my post as artistic director 23 years after that first schools' week felt like coming home. When I hear Janet Baker describe how her time in the Glyndebourne Chorus set the template for the absolute dedication and musicianship exemplified by her illustrious career, in my small way, I get it.

For several years in the 1990s, Glyndebourne education (as it was then, now Learning & Engagement) ran projects in HMP Lewes. Making and devising music and theatre with offenders was

something I had been involved with since university, and I ran creative projects for many orchestras and opera companies in their local nick. Some great projects, to be sure, but at Glyndebourne, rather than being a bolt on, this began a strand of work which developed and affected the heart of the company (and me).

Stephen Plaice was Writer-in-Residence at Lewes Prison. He'd never been involved with opera before, but had written for spoken theatre.



Glyndebourne Archive



Working together with a group of prisoners, singers and a composer, spending a week writing songs and scenes, we'd put on a hastily devised show based on a dramatic theme. Through these intense, and sometimes risky projects we forged a deep bond – artistic and personal. Katie Tearle, then Glyndebourne's head of education spotted what was going on and pushed us onwards: we continued our work in the prison, but Katie also commissioned a community opera from us with ex-offenders, and when that went well, a youth opera – *Misper*, with the composer John Lunn (a fellow 'inmate' on various prison projects, probably best known today as the composer of the music for *Downton Abbey*). A second youth opera, *Zoë*, followed. This was audacious commissioning. Glyndebourne leading the way in 'handing over' their beautiful new stage to the local community – and bringing the community to the heart of the company required courage. The tradition continues, and there are more community operas ahead. Stephen's [Plaice] career was also affected by that encounter and led him on an unexpected journey: he has now written countless libretti and jointly heads up the Guildhall's opera-writing course. This year, he and Marcia Bellamy have written the English version of *The Merry Widow* premiering in Festival 2024. We're all circling back to the mothership!

Projects like these also drew me to consider, and even question, what we mean by artistic excellence. Jung said: 'The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.' I'd say that the same is true of performance, with the meeting of audience and artists – where unforgettable artistic experiences can occur, and experiences can change us. Those transformational moments are impossible to manufacture; all we can do is make the musical dramatic space for the imaginative meeting of artist and audience through music and drama, and let the alchemy happen.

I remember clearly an amazingly creative week in HMP Lewes, and how one man sang a song he'd written to the small audience – invited cellmates and various staff and visitors. He wasn't a very good singer, and the song was not sophisticated, but he



Stephen Langridge in rehearsals for *Zoë* in 2000

communicated the emotion and ideas behind his song with 100% clarity. It was powerful and deeply moving. That was on a Friday morning. That afternoon, I was lucky enough to be here to see the classic production by Peter Sellars of Handel's *Theodora*, and was shaken to the core by Lorraine Hunt Lieberson singing 'As with rosy steps the morn'. Beautifully sung, sophisticated music, big Glyndebourne Festival audience – and again, 100% direct communication. Superficially, these two performances couldn't have been more different. But in fact, the engagement, passion and impact in both cases, were on the highest level. I often talk about the transformative potential of opera, and here were two examples where the promise was fulfilled – certainly I was changed by both experiences. Is that a definition of artistic excellence? Now, in my memory, nearly two decades later, they are inextricably linked, presenting a gold standard of communication through music and theatre, underlining that opera is an accessible, direct and natural mode of expression, which can spring up in unlikely places.

That early work at Glyndebourne helped form me as an artist, and to shape my understanding of what opera is and can be. As this tradition of artistic engagement and excellence continues, we are not trying to replicate past Glyndebourne projects – time and the world have moved on – but to refine the ethos behind the work, through thought, discussion and above all, collaborative practice and performance.

Like the sound of youthful excitement at the schools' performance, in a world that often seems dark and difficult, these shared and pure moments of human exchange through music can bring welcome optimism at this complex and pivotal time in our history. This Glyndebourne-shaped artistic director thinks that music, theatre and opera offer society the chance to develop empathy and imagination, which could help us find a way through the labyrinth of problems we face.

Here's to experiencing many more transformational operatic moments together. It might help change the world!

**Stephen Langridge** is Glyndebourne's Artistic Director



Schoolchildren watch a schools' performance of *L'elisir d'amore*, autumn 2023

# The power of live theatre

Following the recent launch of a national campaign to ensure every child sees a live theatre performance before they leave school, **Kate Harvey** looks at how Glyndebourne's schools' initiatives have been benefitting children for the past 80 years.

**'Theatre changes lives. It encourages empathy and widens our understanding of ourselves in the world. Every child should experience the transformative effects of going to the theatre.'**

These are the words of actor and writer Lolita Chakrabarti, speaking at the October 2023 launch of a new campaign calling on each UK political party to commit to funding a theatre visit for every child before they leave school.

Led by the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre, the campaign coincides with the buildup to a general election in 2024 and follows recent polling showing that 50% of school leaders have cut school trips or outings, including theatre visits, due to the cost-of-living crisis – a figure that has more than doubled since 2022<sup>1</sup>. The problem is particularly acute for schools with the most disadvantaged intakes where 68% of leaders report cutting trips.

The decline in theatre visits adds to existing concern regarding the diminished status of arts and culture subjects in schools. A report published earlier this year called *The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future* found that the arts are vital for young people's intellectual and personal development but are marginalised in today's school system. Among the evidence is the declining rate of GCSE and A-Level entries for arts subjects between 2010 and 2022, as tracked by the Cultural Learning Alliance. Their monitoring

found that entries for GCSE Music have fallen 27%, while A-Level entries for the subject are down 40%. Dramatic drops are also reported in Dance (48% and 47%), Drama (35% and 41%) and Design & Technology (71% and 42%)<sup>2</sup>.

Glyndebourne has spent decades working with schools to foster an interest in opera, music and theatre, stretching back to 1944 when it took over the administration of the Children's Theatre Company, which commissioned productions of plays and toured them around the country to great success. By the end of 1946, its productions had been performed for more than 250,000 children, many of whom were visiting a theatre for the first time.

The Children's Theatre continued to operate until 1951 when dwindling financial support led to its demise and the economic challenges of the post-war period forced Glyndebourne to focus on rebuilding the main Festival. Outreach with children and schools did not stop altogether, however – Glyndebourne member and donor Simon Orebi Gann remembers visiting Glyndebourne with his school in the early 1960s: 'I

was at the Lewes Boys Grammar School and, when I was a younger teenager in 1963 or 1964, Glyndebourne invited my year to attend one of the dress rehearsals. I knew very little about opera, and this one was Richard Strauss' *Capriccio*.'

'There was no preparation for the actual opera from my school or from Glyndebourne, and I was somewhat awed by the magnificent grounds and the opera house, the whole event. Not speaking the language, I found I had little idea about what was going on in the opera, though I do remember

Glyndebourne Archive



The Children's Theatre audience, 1947





Glyndebourne Archive/Maurice Kaye, Illustrated Press

The Children's Theatre audience, 1947

magnificent costumes, and a mostly adult audience. I walked away very impressed with the professionalism and completely unsure of what I had seen and heard, feeling I had missed something.'

Ten years later Simon returned to Glyndebourne as a guest of his mother-in-law to see a performance of *Le nozze di Figaro*. This time, the arrival of surtitles, along with a thorough advance briefing from his host, lifted the experience to another level.

'I am so pleased to see that Glyndebourne since then has made schools a focus of its mission. Choosing the opera carefully, preparing people for what they will see and hear, and engaging them in the whole experience is a leap into a different world. I can see how so much more is now being made of the opportunity to engage the interest of youngsters effectively and early.'

The approach Simon describes began in earnest in 1979 with the launch of what came to be known as The Kent and East Sussex School's Festival, a biennial event comprising a week of Glyndebourne Tour performances presented at Glyndebourne exclusively for schools. Ahead of the visits, a Glyndebourne team went into schools to help students prepare, and performances were given an onstage introduction by the musician and broadcaster Richard Stilgoe, well-known at the time for his humorous songs and regular television appearances, and latterly by Stephen

Langridge. The initiative ran until 1989 during which time more than 20,000 children paid a visit to Glyndebourne.

It was also during that period, in 1986, that Glyndebourne first established a formal education department, under the leadership of Katie Tearle. She took the School's Festival model on the road, alongside the Glyndebourne Tour, to offer children around the country the chance to take part in opera workshops and experience the exhilaration of live performance. The new department also began to expand its work outside of formal education settings through community operas and Glyndebourne Youth Opera. Since 2006, school visits to Glyndebourne take place annually under the Performance for Schools banner, providing fully staged, unabridged performances – at highly subsidised prices.

Lucy Perry, head of Learning and Engagement at Glyndebourne says: 'Opera is the perfect art form for students to encounter music, drama, movement, literature, performance, design and theatre crafts simultaneously – the result of which is exceptionally powerful. We have seen time and again the impact these visits can have, igniting new passions or inspiring young people to imagine a career in the creative industries.'

Freelance graphic designer Kate Benjamin grew up in Lewes and first came to Glyndebourne aged nine, when children from her school

were invited to appear in a new production of *The Electrification of the Soviet Union* by Nigel Osborne. A few years later, in 1994, and then a student at Brighton, Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC) she attended a schools' performance of Harrison Birtwistle's *The Second Mrs Kong*.

'I was studying art and sciences at that point but still playing a lot of classical music in my spare time so I was invited to attend by BHASVIC's music teacher. We did a workshop in the Organ Room before the performance which was focussed on the Vermeer painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which suited me well as someone studying visual arts at the time.'

The performance itself also left a lasting impression, and not only on Kate, whose connection with Glyndebourne continues today. In her career as a graphic designer, she specialises in design for classical music and has worked with Glyndebourne for the past 12 years [and actually designs *Recit* magazine!].

'Funnily enough I met with an old friend a couple of weeks ago who I'd been with at the workshop and we were talking about the set of that production again – it was so impactful for both of us. She's since gone on to be an artist who uses singing and performance in her practice and also leads the fine art sculpture degree at Brighton University.'

That impact is something that conductor Lee Reynolds knows all about. Also raised in Lewes, Lee had his first taste of opera at Glyndebourne where he attended a schools' performance of *Eugene Onegin*, aged 17. 'The overall memory that's stuck was being astonished that this sort of thing existed so close to home', Lee remembers. 'I had always assumed that you had to go to London for a theatre experience like that.'

While music was already a part of Lee's life, he was planning a career in law; by showing him that opera was real and taking place on his doorstep, his Glyndebourne experience encouraged the realisation that he could pursue music. Now an award-winning conductor working with leading opera houses and orchestras, Lee makes his Glyndebourne Festival debut this summer conducting a performance of *The Merry Widow*. He also remains committed to supporting education work, having worked with the Learning & Engagement department at Glyndebourne since 2009, including a stint as music director of Glyndebourne Youth Opera (2015-20). 'I have done loads of work with young musicians in my professional life, and I hope to always keep that thread of work alive in what I do,' he says.

'It is so gratifying now to see some of the people who took part in Glyndebourne education programmes achieving wonderful things as professional performers and in arts-adjacent roles. Perhaps just as



Schoolchildren watch a schools' performance of *L'elisir d'amore*, autumn 2023



important, though, is the people who haven't chosen classical performance as their jobs, but whose young lives were set on a totally different course by those projects – teaching them to be comfortable in their own skin; how to hone their skills of teamwork and shared endeavours; building their self-reliance.'

'We all obviously have to be careful not to define the value of music education only in terms of the 'side effects' it brings, because it is joyous and crucial on its own terms, but I have good reason to think that young people who experience music education programmes have richer and fuller adult lives because of that, whatever they do for work, because I'm one of those people.'



Schoolchildren meet Mariam Battistelli (Adina) after the *L'elisir d'amore* schools performance, autumn 2023

Echoing that view is Amber Owen, director of music at Uckfield College, who went on two school trips to Glyndebourne while a student: 'It was such a great experience to see an opera live,' she says. 'I had never been to see a London show or musical before, so that was my first experience of proper live music with an orchestra.' Last autumn she brought 12 of her own students to a Performance for Schools. 'I absolutely love my job and wanted my students to have the same experience that I did,' she says. 'My students loved *Don Giovanni* and some had told me that it was also their first time watching a proper performance live. I hope the trip can become a yearly event for the school and that we can take some of our younger students next time.'

With less classical music in the classroom, Glyndebourne is using partnerships to amplify its work with schools. Examples include its Singing Schools network (in Crawley and Eastbourne in December 2023) that saw hundreds of children from local state primary and secondary schools work with composer and conductor Howard Moody to invent their own music inspired by our Autumn season repertoire. The project culminated in a sharing event in the community where the students had the unforgettable experience of performing with world-class musicians from the Glyndebourne Chorus and Glyndebourne Sinfonia. Yet more children enjoy that thrill on stage at Glyndebourne each December through the One Voice Festival of Singing, a festive concert that Glyndebourne hosts in partnership with Create Music. In an effort to support music teaching in schools, Glyndebourne delivers teacher training sessions for education professionals, including teachers, PGCE students and other staff. And for the past two years, the opera house has worked in partnership with the Open Doors programme run by East Sussex Careers Hub to introduce students to the range of jobs in opera and career pathways in the creative industries.

As for Performances for Schools themselves, recent years have seen growing attention paid to making sure that the initiative is as inclusive as possible by offering grants to help schools cover the costs of transport for a visit to Glyndebourne and ensuring the opportunity is accessible to students with special needs. As Lucy Perry notes: 'We know that music and other arts subjects are being squeezed from timetables due to time pressure and funding cuts, so we want to do all we can to make a visit to Glyndebourne possible for as many schools as we can. Government funding for a theatre visit for every child before they leave school is an ambitious but achievable goal and would be a concrete step towards ensuring young people enjoy equal access to the transformative experience of live theatre.'

You can find out more about the Theatre For Every Child campaign at [theatreforeverychild.org](http://theatreforeverychild.org)

**Kate Harvey** is Glyndebourne's Senior Press Manager

1. <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/cost-of-living-crisis-hits-school-spending/>
2. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/arts-gcse-and-a-level-entries-2022/>

## Get in touch

Do you have a story to share about a school theatre trip that ignited your passion for the arts? Email us at [membership@glyndebourne.com](mailto:membership@glyndebourne.com)

# The Q&A

This year is one of milestone anniversaries. While Glyndebourne celebrates its 90th year, it is easy to forget that 2024 also marks 30 years of the ‘new’ theatre, which opened in 1994. **Helen McCarthy** has worked both sides of the curtain – in stage management in the old and new theatres and now leads the fundraising team as Director of Development. Her breadth of knowledge and experience has helped to raise funds for many projects, most recently for a place dear to her heart: the core of the theatre – above, below and behind the stage. **Karen Anderson** caught up with her.

**KA: When did you start working at Glyndebourne and what was your role?**

**HM:** I started in May 1988 as an assistant stage manager (ASM) with the knowledge that I would be deputy stage manager (DSM) for the Tour (then known as Glyndebourne Touring Opera) that autumn.

**Can you briefly outline the different jobs you’ve held?**

How long have you got?! I have been ASM, DSM, stage manager and in 1996 became senior stage manager and company manager for the Tour. In 1998 I became the Tour administrator, responsible for booking venues and negotiating the touring deals. I moved into development in 2004 when the structure of the Tour was changed and brought under the Festival umbrella.

**What was/is your favourite Glyndebourne job and why?**

Gosh, that’s a difficult one. I loved being ‘on the book’ as DSM as I used my music skills and felt 100% vital to the performance each night but I also love fundraising, meeting people who love Glyndebourne and want to see it continue for another 90 years. The conversations I have had have been fascinating and I find the psychology of why people give money truly interesting and inspiring.

**Do you have a musical background?**

I was brought up in a musical family but not in a professional way. My parents met due to their love of classical music and they saved hard to give us all piano lessons and after a few years we each chose an orchestral instrument. They discovered opera when they were taken to Glyndebourne (it was the 70s and my mother wore a fabulous orange floral dress, which horrified

us as we thought it was a dressing gown!) and their love of opera continued with trips to ENO whilst still enjoying concerts. I couldn’t bear it when my father listened to opera on the radio and I thought my brother was mad when he became passionate about opera at university. I had no intention of joining the party. However, when it came to looking for my first job, my score reading came in handy (having studied music and drama at university) and I started in 1985 at Opera North, thinking that this would ‘do me for a year’ until I found out what I wanted to do. I was hooked. It had everything – music and drama – it could be a feast for the eyes and the ears.

**How do you think your experience of working at Glyndebourne in various roles helps you fundraise for the organisation today?**

I wondered if I would deeply miss being backstage when I moved ‘to the other side’ (as some people put it) and occasionally I do miss the camaraderie with cast, Chorus and technical staff but my experience in all my roles has been incredibly helpful in my conversations with potential and existing donors. I feel fortunate to have had this varied experience and enjoy telling my stories.

**Your team has been fundraising for the stage automation project and now the orchestra pit – core elements of the ‘new’ theatre that are now older and need updating – how does this passage of time and the need for constant change help energise fundraising?**

It can be a challenge to fundraise for an area which the audience can’t touch and see (ie if the automation project works well you should never notice the difference), especially when it goes on for a few years. When we fundraised through the Annual Fund for three new Steinways a few years ago we could

Guy Gravett



Helen is pictured during her first year at Glyndebourne in 1988 as part of the stage management team



tell the story of two of our music staff going to Germany to see them being made, but backstage is harder to convey. However, we've made a few short films that have helped us illustrate the change – removing all the old equipment, some of which was very large and difficult to dismantle, was historic for us and quite a few of our stage staff have been here since it was installed in 1994, so there was a certain amount of emotion involved. My team has been enthusiastic and excited to find ways of telling these stories to make it interesting to the donor – as a way to inspire people to give and to also thank those who have. Some people love hard facts and details, others like the narrative.

This project has been essential to the future-proofing of Glyndebourne. We need to stay ahead, our level of excellence has to meet international standards and stage directors, especially those coming from Europe and America, have high expectations for the best stage equipment and skills when they arrive to work with us, and that includes an automated stage system.

**How do you make the tech sound exciting, compelling and accessible to others from non stage/theatre backgrounds?**

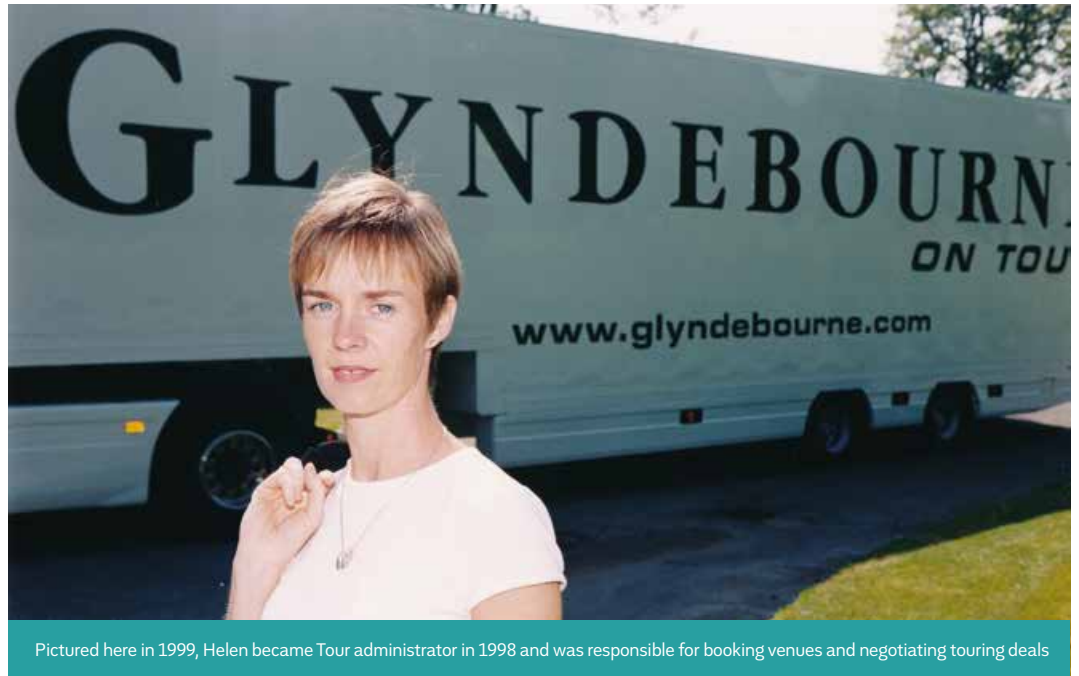
Understanding the tech is not the important part, continuing to hear world-class music is. It is our job to make sure that the audience understands that the upgrade will ensure that the space is as efficient and flexible as possible for all sizes of orchestras. To help fundraise for the work on upgrading the lift system in the orchestra pit our strapline was: 'From the first notes of *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1994 to the final beat of 2023's *The Rake's Progress*, the current orchestra pit has been at the heart of every Festival performance for nearly 30 years' – we concentrated on the music-making to help raise awareness.

**Why is donor support so vital for Glyndebourne's existence?**

Ticket sales at Glyndebourne in 2023 covered approximately 59% of our costs so we have a significant gap to fill, mostly by fundraising (in 2022 total revenue was split by box office 56%, membership 11%, fundraising 26% and other 7%). It is vital to our members and supporters that artistic standards remain high and with no government funding for the Festival (and now greatly reduced funding for the Autumn season) fundraising is essential for Glyndebourne to exist.

**What is the fundraising landscape like at the moment – can philanthropy still thrive in times of economic crisis?**

I do believe that philanthropy can still thrive in times of economic crisis as people who love and believe that the arts are fundamental to life often dig deep in times of crisis. And while some donors give a lot



Pictured here in 1999, Helen became Tour administrator in 1998 and was responsible for booking venues and negotiating touring deals

Mike Hoban

of money, for which we are incredibly grateful, it is also possible to make very small donations to our Annual Fund too – it can be added when paying for tickets, or by making a donation online and these amounts really do build up and make a significant difference.

**What do you most enjoy about fundraising?**

I enjoy meeting new people. I used to find it a bit daunting but not anymore as most people I meet are already engaged with Glyndebourne or in the wider arts landscape. Hearing about others' relationships with Glyndebourne can sometimes be emotional. Meeting donors before performances is often like greeting old friends – genuinely a joy.

I have been fortunate to join a few of the special dinners held by major donors in the Old Green Room, where I have had the opportunity to dine with their family and friends. Recently, one of our closest donors held a huge dinner for 40 guests at one long table, which was filled with his friends from other arts organisations he also supports (theatre, dance and opera). The atmosphere was electric and exciting especially as some of these industry leaders had not attended Glyndebourne before so I had the pleasure of sharing our theatre and our opera with them – and the warmth in the room for this major UK philanthropist was incredible, it was a great event to be part of.

However, the best part of fundraising for Glyndebourne is that I help keep Glyndebourne stable and strong, and that I get to talk about the place, the theatre, the performances I love and which have been part of my life for many years. And I have the pleasure of working with the many wonderful people who want to support us and ensure that we're not just celebrating our 90th anniversary in 2024, but that Glyndebourne will be here celebrating its 150th, its 200th in years to come...

**Karen Anderson** is Glyndebourne's Head of Content

# ‘Every bar makes a beeline for your emotions...’

Conductor **John Wilson** and soprano **Danielle de Niese** forged a strong bond when they collaborated on *Cendrillon* at Glyndebourne in 2019. This summer they’re reunited for a ‘dream’ project: Glyndebourne’s first ever staging of Franz Lehár’s *The Merry Widow*. They talk to **Alexandra Coghlan**.

Danielle de Niese was 35,000 feet in the air when she first encountered *The Merry Widow*, but it was only up from there. ‘I opened the score for the first time on a plane,’ she recalls, ‘and it was like picking up a romantic page-turner: I just couldn’t put it down. I was completely sucked into the relationship between these two strong people, so magnetically drawn to one other but who are kept apart by their pride.’

Lehár’s story is a familiar one: boy meets girl; boy (pressured by his aristocratic family) rejects girl; girl marries someone else. But what’s so unusual about *The Merry Widow* is that it picks up where most stories end, bringing former lovers Hanna and Danilo back together unexpectedly for a second chance at love.

‘I love that concept of “the one that got away”,’ says Danielle, a self-confessed ‘rom-com girl, through and through – we all have that one person, the one we didn’t end up with. In life we often never see them again, but *The Merry Widow* gives us a window onto “What if”. How would you feel if you saw them again? What would you do if they walked back into your life? That’s the feeling it captures.’

How? Mostly through music that sways and pulses with emotion – nostalgia, desire, flirtation, love – a score whose heartbeat is dance (‘If you love *Strictly*,” says Danielle, ‘then this is absolutely the opera for you!’) and one John Wilson wants everyone to hear. ‘I want us to be shouting about it from the rooftops! For me it’s No. 1: the best operetta ever written. Every single bar is inspired. It’s like *Carmen* – every time you turn the page there’s something to look forward to.’

‘There’s absolutely no flab on it,’ he says. ‘Every bar makes a beeline for your emotions. The palette of those emotions is slightly different to a tragedy; it doesn’t aim to plumb the same depths. But what’s the problem with that? The very best pastry chef doesn’t apologise

for being a great pastry chef! This is music that glitters. The tunes should glitter, the singing should glitter. It’s a bright and shiny thing: funny, fast-paced, that makes you laugh but also tugs on your heartstrings.’

John describes Lehár as ‘a supreme master’ of his art, the sole survivor, along with Johann Strauss and his *Die Fledermaus*, of a moment in musical history we’re in danger of forgetting.

‘He writes these extraordinary tunes. They have this memorable quality; it’s like they’ve become part of the music of the spheres in a way. But he wasn’t just a great tunesmith. What elevates Lehár is his instinct for the stage, and when it comes to handling the orchestra he was on a level with someone like Puccini – an absolute master.’

It’s a comparison that’s typical of John, who treats everything he touches – operas or film scores, musical theatre or symphonies – with the same respect. ‘I guess I’m a purist; for me the score is the bible.’ Here that meant painstakingly stripping away decades of conventions and starting completely fresh.

‘It took over 100 years for the full score of *The Merry Widow* to be published [Doblinger produced one in 2005]. Our new edition is being prepared by Lee Reynolds, our assistant conductor, making sure we can hit the ground running with something true to the spirit of the piece.’

And that’s not the only thing that’s new. Cal McCrystal’s new staging will use a specially commissioned English libretto – less a straight translation than an adaptation – by *In the Market For Love*’s Stephen Plaice and Marcia Bellamy, refreshing a smart, satirical show for a contemporary audience. It’s ‘quite a freeing’ point of departure, says Danielle, who has already taken the title role for Opera Australia in





Danielle de Niese and John Wilson during a rehearsal of *Cendrillon* at Glyndebourne in 2019

2017, and one that will strip away some of the clichés clinging to the piece, ‘opening up a lot of new space for interpretation. It’s the same story with musical style’, says John.

‘There’s such a fine line between tradition and habit. We’re an English orchestra performing *Widow* at an English opera house. We can’t just decide to “do” the Viennese thing. If you watch the Vienna Philharmonic’s New Year’s Day concert it’s inimitable, so subtle. So we have to find our own language, our own way to make it work authentically. It needs to be poised, elegant, shining, and we’ll be experimenting in rehearsals to find out what works.’

John is excited to work with the king of physical comedy Cal McCrystal for the first time (‘I saw his *Iolanthe* twice I loved it so much! I laughed my insides out.’). But his partnership with his leading lady is already tried and tested.

‘What I love about John,’ says Danielle, ‘is that he has this innate dramatic sense, he’s never sentimental. You can’t luxuriate too much in this music, it loses its energy, its spirit. It’s a dream for me to work with him again because we already have this instinctive communication and connection. It’s musical magic, and that’s what you need for *The Merry Widow*.’

**Alexandra Coghlan** is Glyndebourne’s opera specialist

# A tale of two Carmens

This year will see not one, but two exceptional singers take on the role of Carmen – opera’s greatest rebel. The double run during Festival 2024 will see **Rihab Chaieb** and **Aigul Akhmetshina** take on this celebrated role. So what is it that makes this defiant heroine so compelling? **Andrew Batty** finds out.

It’s been a while since Bizet’s *Carmen* was last staged at Glyndebourne, and even longer since we commissioned a new production of the opera. We know that Diane Paulus’ searing new take on the story will be a hot ticket this summer, and we’ve scheduled two runs of the production at the start and end of the Festival, giving ample opportunity to catch it. Each run has a different main cast, and we are very excited about the two singers in the title role.

Rihab Chaieb will headline the May and June shows, with Aigul Akhmetshina taking over in August. Both singers have appeared in the Festival before, Rihab as Mercédès in our last *Carmen* (2015) and Flora in *La traviata* (2017), and Aigul as Varvara in *Káťa Kabanová* (2021). Since their last Glyndebourne appearances, both have been in high demand at houses around the world, particularly in the role of Carmen. Rihab has sung the part in Germany, the US and twice in Canada. Meanwhile Aigul is calling this season ‘50 shades of Carmen’ – currently playing the role in ENO’s *Six Deaths of Maria Callas*, and with productions coming up at the Met and the Royal Opera House.

As such, the two singers are perfectly placed to tell us what makes *Carmen* so attractive to audiences. For both of them, it’s Carmen herself who makes this story so captivating: ‘From the very first seconds of her entrance she commands the stage, oozes self-confidence, is unashamed of her sexuality and expresses herself freely’ says Rihab. ‘She doesn’t let anyone boss her around, she’s in total control of her choices and will stick to her way of life regardless of the cost.’

For Aigul there’s an ambiguity about the character that lends itself to creativity, ‘it’s one of the rare operas which you can interpret in so many different ways and it will not harm the music’ she says. ‘That’s the reason why people love to put their own touch, and their own vision into this opera and into the character – nobody can clearly answer “who is Carmen?”’. Rihab agrees, ‘I think Carmen embodies many different aspects. She’s both the yin and the yang: she’s sensual and feminine but also fierce, courageous and has masculine energy’. For Aigul, it’s also important to avoid clichés when playing the part, ‘I don’t like when people portray her only as a “sexy woman”. That’s one of her powers but it’s not all that there is to her. She’s such a complex character.’

The complexity of the character means every performance of *Carmen* can be different, allowing performers to channel their own emotions into the part, as Aigul tells us: ‘when I was performing in Munich, I was playful. I had such a flirty mood and I was dancing around like a butterfly. Then I had to go on stage the day my father died. And it was a very different, difficult performance, a very dark performance. It’s like the music carried me through.’

It is of course Bizet’s music that helps to make the character so compelling, ‘the score is filled with memorable melodies that captivate the listener’ says Rihab, ‘Carmen has several iconic arias which showcase her rebellious, free-spirited nature. These melodies make us empathise with her. The musical backdrop of colourful orchestration and Spanish rhythms contributes to *Carmen*’s appeal and draws us towards her. How can you not root for Carmen?’

Robert Workman



Rihab Chaieb (left) as Mercédès with Eliana Pretorian as Frasquita in Festival 2015’s production of *Carmen* directed by David McVicar





Richard Hubert Smith

Aigul Akhmetshina as Varvara in Festival 2021's production of *Káťa Kabanová* with Thomas Atkins as Kudrjaš

The opera is also unusual in its form, incorporating a lot more spoken dialogue than you might expect. 'Carmen is not an opera for me, it's a cabaret show, it's a theatre play' says Aigul. 'For me the role is not a challenging one to sing, it is about acting. We have to live the story.'

Carmen is often a very physical role for performers, and this production will be no exception, featuring choreography from Jasmin Vardimon. 'If there's one physical role in opera, it's Carmen. She dances, she fights, she fights back' says Rihab. Aigul agrees, and relishes the opportunity to work on choreography, 'I love dancing on stage – it's an extra challenge. And actually, I get a bit upset if Carmen doesn't have a chance to dance!'

Bringing this new production to the stage is Broadway director Diane Paulus, and working with her will be a new experience for both of the singers. 'I'm eager to delve into Carmen's psychology with her and discover her take on such a strong female character' says Rihab. Aigul adds that 'It will be interesting to see a woman's perspective on Carmen because all the productions I have done so far have been directed by men'.

Thanks to Glyndebourne's unusually long rehearsal process, the singers will have ample opportunity to dig into their characters. 'This time gives us singers the peace of mind to try new things and discover different ways to approach a role or a scene' says Rihab. 'That way, when opening night comes around, we are relaxed and confident because we know every minute detail has been taken care of.' For Aigul, this extended time helps to find new ways into the character, but also to work out relationships between characters and add depth to the performance. 'It is great having time to build relationships with your colleagues' she says. 'Because in the end the audience is supposed to believe us that we are absolutely in love at one moment, and that we hate each other the next. We need time to go through all the layers of it.'

You can see the results of this process this summer. And if you've seen *Carmen* a hundred times before, or you're completely new to it, you will find plenty to keep you entertained. Or as Rihab puts it, 'this opera gives everything a newcomer or an expert fan wants: a gripping story, earworm hits, a *femme fatale*, dancing, drama and sex!'

**Andrew Batty** is Glyndebourne's Digital Content Editor



Caroline Wettergreen as Queen of the Night, *Die Zauberflöte*, Festival 2019

# Queen of the heights

Mozart's legendary Queen of the Night, and her vocal acrobatics, are probably the most well known in all of opera. But just what does it take to sing at those dizzying heights? **Philippa Burbidge** finds out.

The Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) is a role that is often defined by the moment when the soprano reveals her first series of eight high Cs in the show-stopping, ear-piercing, breathtaking and (nearly) glass-cracking aria '*Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen*' ('Hell's vengeance boils in my heart').

It is an aria that has become synonymous with the beauties and extremes of the human voice. It is simultaneously marvelled at (it was chosen as one of the tracks on 'The Golden Record', a disc sent up to space in 1977 as part of NASA's Voyager missions, containing sounds selected to portray the diversity of life on Earth) and joked about – it doesn't take much searching to find abundant karaoke versions, whistling versions and even a parrot version in the intergalactic space of YouTube.

'*Der Hölle Rache*' is the second of two solo arias in the opera – the first, '*O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn*' ('O tremble not, my dear son') is no less virtuosic than its more famous sister aria, but it's '*Der Hölle Rache*' that earworms itself into the memory, and embodies the drama of the role. It is an aria that keeps audiences poised and waiting on the edges of their seats for that moment when the Queen appears, dagger in hand, spitting with rage.

How does a soprano prepare to deliver an aria that requires such power and virtuosity all at once? What are the main challenges they have to conquer? '*Der Hölle Rache*' appears almost halfway through the opera, after an extended passage of dialogue between the Queen, her daughter Pamina and Sarastro's slave Monostatos. Mary King, Glyndebourne's vocal talent consultant, believes that the sheer



amount of dialogue is one of the major challenges for a soprano: ‘The speaking voice needs to have the same resonance as the singing voice’ she says. ‘The Queen has to speak with authority, two octaves below the range she needs for singing, and then switch between the speaking voice and singing voice quite quickly. To bridge this gap is a big challenge.’

The range of the Queen’s voice spans more than two octaves, and climbs to the height of F6 (two and a half octaves above middle C). Although it’s the repeated staccato high Cs of ‘*Der Hölle Rache*’ that first command the audience’s attention in the aria, it’s the quality of the high F that is one of the real ‘wow’ factors in the aria. Mary maintains that most sopranos have got a high C in their vocal jewellery box, but the ability to produce a high F, especially in the midst of dagger-wielding high drama (and in addition to the other vocal requirements of the role), is much more of a rarity. ‘There are often 15 more sopranos than any other voice type in auditions – and of these 15 sopranos, usually only one can do Queen of the Night’.

So, casting the role from a relatively small pool is another kind of challenge. Ann Rawdon Smith, Glyndebourne’s casting administrator, explains that when casting the role ‘we look at the high tessitura – the ability to produce crystalline high notes as well as dramatic coloratura. Not many singers have the combination of lyric warmth in the middle register, vocal agility and the capacity to sustain a legato line in the long phrases.’

The heady mix of other technical virtuositities demanded by the role includes passages of coloratura incorporating high-speed

scales, extended triplet passages, staccato arpeggios as well as the ability to create long and beautiful phrases with sustained breath control.

Another challenge a Queen faces are the staging and directorial requirements of the role. In the 1985 film of Peter Shaffer’s iconic *Amadeus*, the Queen of the Night appears suspended from the heavens on high with a silver crown – her spectacular appearance and vocal acrobatics hold the audience (including a transfixed Salieri) spellbound. Diana Damrau’s Queen of the Night at the Royal Opera House in 2003 wore a particularly elaborate headdress. Her powerful rendition of ‘*Der Hölle Rache*’ has amassed an astonishing 56 million views on YouTube – and the costume is as impactful and memorable as the penetrating high notes.

In Barbe & Doucet’s 2019 production of *Die Zauberflöte*, which will be revived this year, the suffragette Queen’s dagger is a kitchen knife, and the monochrome coat covering her regal purple robe is inscribed with the mantra ‘Deeds not words’. In 2019 the role was sung by Caroline Wettergreen whose Queen made headlines by leaping up a further octave to even loftier heights at the end of ‘*O zittre nicht*’. The production was due to tour in 2020 (sadly cancelled due to the Covid pandemic) with a new young Queen, Polish soprano Aleksandra Olczyk. Since then, she has become one of the most sought-after Queens in opera. From January 2024 she’ll be taking the role to Paris, Berlin, Rome and Dresden before she arrives for her eagerly anticipated Glyndebourne debut in May.

**Philippa Burbidge** is Glyndebourne’s Senior Marketing Manager

Bill Cooper



Queen of the Night (Caroline Wettergreen) with her daughter Pamina (Sofia Fomina), *Die Zauberflöte*, 2019



In Festival 2024 Aleksandra Olczyk will make her Glyndebourne debut as Queen of the Night

# Embracing Caesar's power

Just ten years ago **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen** was at New York's Metropolitan Opera seeing his first ever Handel opera: David McVicar's hugely popular *Giulio Cesare*. Next summer, he tells **Alexandra Coghlan**, he'll swap his seat in the audience for a place centre-stage, as he returns to Glyndebourne in the title role.

'It definitely happened more quickly than I ever dreamt or expected!' Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen laughs, talking over Zoom from his home in northern California. 'I only saw my first opera when I was an undergrad, but I just immediately fell in love with it – the drama just blew me away.'

The American countertenor – whose alto voice was less a conscious choice and more an 'accident' of growing up singing in choirs in New York – had an unconventional route into opera. A history degree at Princeton was supposed to lead to law school, but then Aryeh caught the opera bug. Initial disappointment – 'I got to the finals of everything, then got rejected everywhere' – was transformed almost overnight when he won the prestigious Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 2017.

'I entered on a whim; I didn't think I was ready. To win was a complete shock, and then to wake up the next morning to a *New York Times* headline: "Met Opera discovers a young star"!'

Since then, Aryeh's rise has been swift, but he's always being brought back to *Giulio Cesare*. 'It was the first Handel opera I was in as a Young Artist – I sang Nireno, the smallest of the countertenor roles, but Caesar was always the dream. To sing it in David McVicar's production at Glyndebourne is a dream come true; it feels like coming full circle.'

From Nireno to the scheming Tolomeo and heartbroken Sesto, *Giulio Cesare* isn't an opera short on countertenors. So what sets Cesare himself apart? 'Musically it's exquisite, but what's remarkable about

Jiyang Chen



Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen takes the role of Caesar in Festival 2024



Richard Hubert Smith



Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen made his Glyndebourne debut as Athamus (pictured here with Stephanie Wake-Edwards as Ino) in the Festival 2023 production of *Semele*

Handel's Caesar is that he's a legend, a character who's often a caricature that Handel transforms into a three-dimensional man: a commanding figure who's also very emotional. My favourite moment is actually a recitative – '*Alma del gran Pompeo*'. It's the first time we see him as this wounded human, brooding on his own mortality.'

And then there's the push-pull tension and ambiguity of Caesar's relationship with Cleopatra – something Aryeh sees as evolving through the opera. 'I think both have a similar arc: they each think they are using the other, and then love becomes real. That makes it so special – the fact that neither thinks they're really falling, but they do. You hear that playing out through the piece, culminating in the final duet which is such a real, undeniable expression of love.'

The role of Caesar is synonymous at Glyndebourne with Sarah Connolly – the award-winning mezzo sang it in 2005, 2009 and 2018. But it's a part that was originally composed for a castrato: the great Senesino, arch rival of Farinelli.

'The castrati were the first modern celebrities, the engine of opera's rise to become a popular art-form,' says Aryeh. 'But we don't really know what they sounded like. My job today is not to try and imitate them, it's to try and create the most heroic, beautiful countertenor sound possible. That said, I did a 'Three Countertenors' concert in Rome recently, and one critic said I was the closest thing they've ever heard to the sound of a natural castrato. I have that purity combined with power. In many ways that's what those original singers brought to the stage.'

The musical history of the male alto voice mirrors shifting ideas of masculinity and gender, Aryeh explains. 'What the tenor is to 19th-century opera, the castrato is to the 18th century. When you think of a character like Julius Caesar, a man singing in what is stereotypically a woman's range isn't what immediately comes to mind! But Baroque composers really exploited the heroic quality of the voice, whereas contemporary composers tend to focus on this other-worldliness.'

Aryeh describes Sarah Connolly as 'a vocal and artistic hero' of his. 'The thought of stepping into those shoes is very scary indeed,' he admits. 'I feel an incredible responsibility to do justice to this role in this place.'

The countertenor, who loves hiking, cooking and gardening in his spare time, and describes himself as 'a sweeter soul' than his Imperial alter-ego, has worked with Connolly on the role after they met working on Brett Dean's *Hamlet* at the Met. 'The biggest thing I took away was how to create a sense of Caesar's power. He has to feel different to everyone else on stage.'

So what will Aryeh's Caesar look and sound like? 'What I try to bring to every role is a real intensity of dramatic conviction. For me that's what it's all about. If a performance is beautifully sung but there isn't that drama then I'm left unsatisfied.'

'I also hope that I'll bring a different energy and challenge some of our perceptions about Caesar. Maybe I'm an artist audiences don't know, or don't know as well yet. But I hope that later they'll look back and think: "I'm glad I was there to see that".'



Nikolaus Lehnhoff brought his own modernist style, with clear echoes of Wieland Wagner's own austere Bayreuthian productions, as seen here in Festival 2007

# Staging Wagner

Ahead of Festival 2024's revival of Nikolaus Lehnhoff's iconic *Tristan und Isolde*, **Philip Boot** discovers that Wagner was making his mark at Glyndebourne long before this opera was staged.

Glyndebourne has always been a 'Wagner house', if not in size, then certainly in spirit, intention and ambition. An announcement in the *London Evening News* on 29 June 1933 proclaimed that 1934 would see the launch of a new opera festival in Sussex with 'either Mozart's *Don Giovanni* or Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre*', with a production of *Parsifal* and a *Ring Cycle* coming that Easter. The announcement was made by Glyndebourne's co-founder and Wagnerite John Christie. Later in October 1933, he would place an advertisement in *The Daily Express* announcing his Festival plans with no mention of *Die Walküre*. Not one of these operas would make it to the inaugural Festival, with Glyndebourne opting to establish itself firmly as a 'Mozart house', it would instead stage productions of *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*.

With the 'Mozart' Festival at Glyndebourne, as it was initially known, came the arrival of new standards and expectations, for performers, audiences and the opera. In emulating Wagner's

own *Bayreuther Festspiele* (Bayreuth Festival), its reputation for unsurpassed quality and festival concept, the arrival of the Glyndebourne season transformed opera in Britain totally. New, European, ways of producing opera had swept through the house with the arrival of Carl Ebert (Artistic Director) and Fritz Busch (Music Director), both refugees from Nazi Germany, as they brought with them their reputations for quality, high standards and a deep knowledge of theatre craft. As Wagner had searched for a more immersive opera experience, Glyndebourne would, under the direction of Busch and Ebert, create more rounded, three-dimensional characters on stage, wow audiences with the spectacle of the sets and lighting and guarantee that performers and the musical ensemble were at their best.

Looking at photographs of productions from the 1930s at Glyndebourne, it is hard to grasp the sheer spectacle of the operas experienced by audience-goers during that first Festival season.



Through our 2024 lens ‘spectacle’ can mean many things – the scale, the unexpected or something completely new – so much so that the 1934 sets could look underwhelming. One can be assured that they were not. Audiences were astonished at the productions – the music, performance, sets, lighting, costumes, scale and quality. Reviews credited Glyndebourne’s first productions as ‘intelligent’, ‘imaginative’ and as being ‘the finest to ever be staged in Britain’. This is Wagner’s true legacy to Glyndebourne, an immersive experience firmly rooted in high levels of quality, spectacle and storytelling.

The sheer scale of the Wagner operas meant that the first opera house at Glyndebourne, being too small, was just not the right place to stage the likes of *Die Walküre* or *Parsifal*. Despite being designed by Christie, the theatre was simply too intimate for opera on such a large scale, leading Ebert to comment that if Christie wished to stage *Parsifal*, it would work only ‘if you put the singers and the orchestra in the auditorium and the audience on stage’. Between Ebert and Audrey Mildmay, who herself knew that the theatre (and her own voice) were unsuitable for Wagner, they pushed Christie, not unwillingly, towards Mozart instead.

We, of course, know how this ends. A Wagner opera finally entered the Glyndebourne repertoire in 2003, with a production of *Tristan und Isolde*, directed by the legendary Nikolaus Lehnhoff, himself well-versed in Wagner operas having directed numerous productions around the world, including the *Ring Cycle*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Parsifal*. Lehnhoff was also assistant to Wieland Wagner, Wagner’s grandson and director of the Bayreuth Festival (interestingly, Christie had unsuccessfully tried to bring *Tristan* to Glyndebourne under Wieland’s direction in 1953). Christie’s dream of building a house for Wagner opera had finally been fulfilled 40 years after his death. The only Wagner Christie heard at Glyndebourne in his lifetime was the *Siegfried Idyll* (1953, conducted by John Pritchard) and a semi-amateur performance of a scene from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the Organ Room, in which he appeared as Beckmesser.

The arrival of the new opera house at Glyndebourne in 1994, the brainchild of George Christie, meant that Wagner operas in the heart of the South Downs were no longer a pipedream. Whilst space was still tight, the backstage areas, acoustics and intimacy that the new theatre presented meant the production, led by Lehnhoff and conductor Jiří Bělohlávek, was now feasible. Now the third-longest running opera production at Glyndebourne, *Tristan* opened to critical acclaim. Lehnhoff brought his own modernist style, embracing vivid colours with clear echoes of Wieland Wagner’s own austere Bayreuthian productions. As Daniel Dooner, revival director of Festival 2024’s *Tristan* notes, ‘Lehnhoff’s stagings were classic examples of German *Regietheater*, as envisioned by its great 20th-century practitioner, Wieland Wagner: theatre as a directional design of gesture, movement, lighting and setting bringing out the subtext in the piece being performed... Wieland’s stamp never stopped being discernible on Nikolaus’ work.’ For his part, in bringing the production to Glyndebourne in 2003, Bělohlávek even reverted to the source material, stripping back past additions, alterations and tinkering that performances had added to all of the orchestral parts within the score over 138 years since its premiere, resulting in the piece sounding almost like chamber music.



Robert Gambill and Nina Stemme in the title roles, *Tristan und Isolde*, Festival 2007

*Continues overleaf >>*



Simon O'Neil and Miina-Liisa Väre in the Festival 2021 semi-staged production of *Tristan und Isolde*, conducted by Robin Ticciati

Despite only debuting at Glyndebourne in 2003, Wagner sits at the very heart of the repertoire. The Wagner frenzy that swept through Victorian Britain had finally arrived at Glyndebourne. *Tristan* was followed by David McVicar's *Die Meistersinger* in 2011, another triumphant success for the Festival. McVicar's production brought a naturalism and authenticity in the costume and scenery to the opera, whilst updating it from the 16th century to post-Napoleonic Germany. Interestingly, baritone Gerald Finley (who played Hans Sachs in both the 2011 and 2016 productions) notes that this *Die Meistersinger* compared with other productions, 'first and foremost, Glyndebourne's production shows a desire to make every character well-defined, real and human.' And with that comment, we come full circle, back to Busch and Ebert's skill in creating immersive, believable and emotionally-charged theatre by making each performer a well-defined, realistic character from the very first Festival performance. *Die Meistersinger* is the largest production the opera house has ever staged and is unlikely to be the last opera by Wagner to be produced at Glyndebourne. Good things always come in threes...

**Philip Boot** is Glyndebourne's Archivist

## Taking the lead

**2003 and 2007**

Tristan: **Robert Gambill**  
Isolde: **Nina Stemme**

**2009**

Tristan: **Torsten Kerl**  
Isolde: **Anja Kampe**

**2021 (concert staging)**

Tristan: **Simon O'Neil**  
Isolde: **Miina-Liisa Väre**

**2024**

Tristan: **Stuart Skelton**  
Isolde: **Miina-Liisa Väre**

# FESTIVAL 2024

16 MAY – 25 AUGUST

CARMEN\*<sub>BIZET</sub>

DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE<sub>MOZART</sub>  
THE MAGIC FLUTE

THE MERRY WIDOW\*<sub>LEHÁR</sub>

GIULIO CESARE<sub>HANDEL</sub>

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE<sub>WAGNER</sub>

\*NEW PRODUCTION

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FESTIVAL SOCIETY MEMBERS  
FRIDAY 12 JANUARY - BALLOT DEADLINE

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS  
FRIDAY 2 FEBRUARY - BALLOT DEADLINE

MEMBERS' SECOND OPPORTUNITY TO BOOK  
THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY - ONLINE

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MONDAY 19 FEBRUARY - ONLINE BOOKING OPENS

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CELEBRATING  
90 YEARS OF  
GLYNDEBOURNE 90



# Green and pleasant land

Glyndebourne's gardens have a reputation to impress with much of the work behind the scenes inspired by garden adviser **John Hoyland**. **Karen Anderson** met up with him and **Gus Christie** to find out what to look forward to in 2024.

Long before visitors start to arrive with their picnic baskets and blankets and set up camp on the lawns around the lake, or in the secluded spots in the long grass, there has been a lot of activity in the Glyndebourne gardens. Dew-wet sandals, flying frisbees, humming mowers, loquacious lunches are commonplace for those of us lucky enough to take them for granted. This space is neat and yet wild, boisterous and yet calm, colourful and yet green – every shade of green.

As a bucolic setting it is hard to beat, and to keep it as the 'special place' it has become for so many visitors each year takes a lot of planning and hard graft. Glyndebourne's team of gardeners are advised by John Hoyland, who for the last 15 years has worked with Gus Christie, Danielle de Niese and head gardener Kevin Martin to keep the legacy of the gardens alive while enhancing and developing them for the future. He doesn't take this responsibility lightly. 'As we are celebrating Glyndebourne's 90th anniversary in 2024, we can't ignore the fact that while we've been staging opera for 90 years, the gardens have been visited and enjoyed for 90 years too,' he says. Conscious of the gardens' legacy he pays homage to those that influenced the design before him. 'Over the years there have been some pretty important gardening personalities involved, like Vita Sackville-West. She was a friend of John Christie's and although there is no record of the gardening advice she may have given him, she was a regular visitor who was influential and respected, and her 1953 description still resonates today.'

**'There is nothing like Glyndebourne in these islands; and the gardens, in their traditional simplicity without any pretentiousness, round off the summer evening with the elegance and grace of formality and with the romanticism of a wilder, more natural design.'**

*Vita Sackville-West, author and garden designer*

Renowned gardener Christopher Lloyd was Mary Christie's mentor for many years and inspired her development of the gardens, as did Mary Keen who designed the Bourne Garden. 'So when you're looking forward in the gardens, you feel the ghosts of those people behind you' John adds. 'You want to make sure that you do a good job for them, while respecting Mary's [Christie] influence too, and honouring what she did. You want to make sure you do the best that we can in the gardens, just as we do on stage.'

Gus Christie concurs. 'The gardens were definitely mum's baby! She was passionate and held strong opinions on how they should look and feel. She and John didn't always agree and their discussions were sometimes quite heated! Mum liked everything tumbling over the walkways and John wanted to contain things a bit more.' Their mutual respect did, however, prevail. 'I very much valued her perspective and she valued mine, we managed to rub along well together, John notes. 'Mary didn't like too much change all at once and of course a garden can't really stay still, they grow and evolve, and are continually changing. And that is one of the challenges at Glyndebourne really – over the years it hasn't just been Mary's views that I had to take into consideration, but those of the staff and audience too. It's very important for us that audiences feel in some ways proprietary. But it means that if we change anything they have something to say about it! I love that we have a lot of gardeners amongst our Membership, it keeps me on my toes.'

The replanting of the Bourne Garden in 2024 is a new initiative that has been considered and planned meticulously. Originally commissioned by Mary Christie, and designed and planted by Mary Keen at the time of the new opera house (1993-94) the Bourne Garden is an extravagant and exuberant garden space, the idea behind which was to be 'very dramatic, extravagant and exotic' as John explains. 'The idea was that it would give you some hint of the drama and the excitement that was happening inside the opera house.'

But 30 years on, it is starting to look a little bit tired. 'Back in the day it was very contemporary, very cutting edge,' John says. 'The plants hadn't really been seen before, and plants like tree ferns at the time were absolutely unusual. *Echiums* in this kind of climate were rarely seen. Now every London patio has got a tree fern! The plants that at that time were exotic are now commonplace. So, what we want to do is reinvigorate it. We want to keep the same mood, the same atmosphere of drama and excitement, reduce some of the *Hostas* and *Acanthus* that are now familiar and introduce plants that our audience might not be aware of. We want the gardens to excite and enthral everyone, and that includes the keen gardeners and horticulturalists, we want to tease them with unusual and interesting plants, we want to show off!'

New plants will include some rare and unusual forms of common shrubs such as lilacs and buddleia. Both families have species (wild forms) that are rarely seen in British gardens. One variety of cobra lily, *Arisaema*, is already at home in the garden and the collection will be extended to include Japanese and other Asian species that 20 years ago were unknown to gardeners. All varieties have a curious hooded flower that gives the plant its common name.

Similarly, plant hunters and rare plant nurseries have recently introduced several forms of *Begonia*, often with large, impressive leaves which will be added to the Bourne Garden. 'We will continue to test what plants will survive in our changing climate,' John says. 'Some years the blue spires of the *Echiums* survive the winter; other years we lose them all. The evergreen foliage of the *Trochodendron* has shrugged off several cold winters here and we will be trying out other borderline-hardy shrubs such as *Duranta*, which has arching stems of elegant blue flowers and *Schefflera* – better known as an evergreen house plant but which has several hardier cousins.'

Most of the heavy work will take place over the winter months, and there are lots of rocks going in. 'These do two things', Gus explains. 'This garden is on a slope and we have to retain the soil, so the rocks will help us do that and we want to introduce a wider range of habitats too. For this we'll be bringing in some fallen tree stumps from elsewhere in the gardens to provide a different environment for the plants and are good habitats for invertebrates, birds and small animals, which helps with biodiversity.' John adds 'every gardener is concerned about the way that the climate is changing. It's getting milder, but it's also much wetter than it used to be – and we are



Clive Nichols

The Bourne Garden will be revamped in 2024



having to adapt our planting throughout the garden to that. During this major replant it is at the forefront of our minds. We're trying to anticipate what plants are going to adapt best to, and being mindful of, wetter and warmer conditions. There are far fewer frosts than there have been, but we don't know what's around the corner, we might suddenly get some severe frosts. The biggest challenge for us is the weather – its extremes, its secrets and not knowing what it holds for us.'

Further changes during 2024 will include the provision of herbs and fruit in the Glyndebourne restaurants. 'It's the first time we'll be doing this,' Gus notes. 'We talked about it and planned for it in recent years but then Covid got in the way. So now part of the vegetable garden will be given over to producing parsley, chives, and lots of other herbs. Fruit too from the orchards. And I'm excited because although it's a very small step, it's part of the cycle of reducing food miles – we want to reduce plant miles.'

'In terms of sustainability, the gardens are, I think, pretty unmatched', John adds. A sophisticated compost system ensures that all garden waste, apart from a few pernicious weeds, is recycled back into the gardens, and any other necessary compost is from recycled house waste, bought from the local council. 'I'm also very proud of the fact that we can produce our own plants, which is seen as an old-fashioned way of acquiring plants today,' he says. 'But we don't want to be buying plants from Italy, Belgium, or from France – we want and we can produce them ourselves. From a gardener's point of view, it makes our job far more interesting. But it also keeps those skills alive. Propagating plants is not really seen as part of a gardener's job that much anymore. But it's central here, and we think that is important.'

A new, wild beehive was installed last year by Matt Sommerville of Bee Kind Hives, with plans for an additional wild hive in place for 2024 following a recent donation to Glyndebourne's Garden Fund for this. 'Gardens are expensive, so all donations to this Fund really do help. I am incredibly appreciative that people want to help us maintain the gardens and support us like this,' John says.

With wild meadows and rewilding very much in vogue, Glyndebourne has plans of its own too. 'Over the next few years, I'm hoping to branch out into some areas of the estate that are not suitable for farming and rewild', Gus explains. 'Just basically give nature a helping hand to come back. We've got a landscape architect, and we're going to create more wetland, more woodland, and more meadowland. There will be three distinct habitats and we're still figuring out what kinds of animals we're going to have to help us get to where we want to be. But it's basically as much bird life and insect life as we can help to generate. You'll still see sheep and green pastures in the fields surrounding Glyndebourne, but a bit further out the land will be rewilded, and you never know we might, in time, put some lodges up and there might be some accommodation for our more intrepid visitors. But that's down the road a bit...'



Mary Christie pictured with the gardeners during the planting of the Bourne Garden, 1994

As with all aspects of work at Glyndebourne there is a shared aim to protect and respect the environment. 'I don't want to come across all "holier than thou" but we're only here for a very brief time, and you have to try and do the least harm' John says. 'I think when you inherit an estate, it's one's obligation to try and leave it in a better state than when you inherited it,' Gus adds. 'My dad did this when he built the new theatre, and I'm trying to do this now in how we work at Glyndebourne, part of our ethos is to respect the world around us.'

**Karen Anderson** is Glyndebourne's Head of Content



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James Bellorini



Member Open Days, 2023



Member Open Days, 2023

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# Celebrating long service

## Teena Symonds



Head chaperone Teena Symonds left Glyndebourne at the end of 2023, having spent 33 years looking after performing children, and during that time has worked on over 30 Festival and Tour productions, and six community or youth opera projects.

'The Christie family has created a very special place of beauty and brilliance at Glyndebourne,' Teena says. 'Staff remain here so long because we are proud to be part of an organisation that produces such a wealth of excellence and quality.' And in her role as head chaperone 'introducing children (and their parents) to an opera for their first time was a privilege,' she says. 'The growing realisation that what they are learning could be a career choice amazes them. They witness first hand, the groundwork required from musicians, conductors, singers, designers, choreographers, stage management, lighting, crew, costume, wardrobe, wigs, make-up and administration. They are made aware of the passion that music and production can bring to performers and audiences.'

'I remember one seven-year-old boy, who was playing the 'changeling child' in Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, described how he felt and how it changed him, he told me "I was lifted through a large window at the back of the stage by dark-costumed fairies with huge wings, and transported over the heads of the dancers to the front of the stage – where the full orchestra struck up with full force at my feet – and wow! I had never experienced a feeling like that – EVER! I knew then – that music was going to be a big part of my life!"

'He is now a multi-instrumentalist and writes his own music and songs, Teena adds. 'Many children have passed through Glyndebourne and gone on to diverse careers in the arts – and those that haven't have become educated audiences, fully appreciating the experience.'

Teena will continue to teach speech and drama part-time, run ballet classes and a choir for senior citizens in Bexhill-on-Sea. 'I might even try "old lady acting" at some stage – I'd be quite keen to take on an acting role in a Glyndebourne production.' Watch this space...



Glyndebourne Archive



Guy Gravett



James Belorini

**Left:** Jules pictured with the puppets from *Where the Wild Things Are*, 1984/85

**Above:** Jules (top row, standing and laughing) on the set of *Peter Grimes*, 1992, with members of the crew

## Jules Crocker

**When Jules retires after Festival 2024, she'll have worked at Glyndebourne for a staggering 46 years.**

Jules' Glyndebourne journey began in stage management (first as an ASM, then a DSM, then later in 1990 as a stage manager). A familiar face front of house (she became house manager in 1993) she has also visited many other venues during her time here: 'I started in 1978 and in 1979, in addition to touring to our regional venues, we travelled to France with performances in Paris and Nancy', she says. 'In 1986 we took two productions to the Hong Kong Festival of Performing Arts. Then in July 1992, when the old theatre was knocked down, I became company stage manager for the two autumn seasons at Sadler's Wells before going out on tour, which included a week in Dublin.'

As Jules starts to prepare for her next chapter away from Glyndebourne, she notes that the best part of her job has been 'just loving what I do and working with wonderful people day in, day out.' She will miss 'the buzz and excitement of being on duty for performances. How lucky I am to have had the opportunity to hear live opera night after night!' She'll miss the audience too, 'I enjoy trying to make sure that any visitors to

Glyndebourne have the best possible experience. No two days are the same and the greeting I get from many of our audience members, who have been involved with Glyndebourne as long as me, is so heart-warming.'

When asked about her favourite memories she found it difficult to just pick one: 'One favourite has to be when I was a stage manager and watched the Chorus spending the morning learning how to gut fish with a local fishmonger in the rehearsal studio – Trevor Nunn insisted on the real thing being on stage for his production of *Peter Grimes*.' And she's rarely had a dull moment front of house: 'Over the years we've helped find mislaid picnics, taken care of wildlife (hedgehogs, stray cats, peacocks, bats, chickens, sheep), had broken shoes mended, scooped people up out of the ha-ha, retrieved items from the lake, helped cars out of muddy spaces and sewed people back into their clothes. And so much more!' And during the past 46 years does she have a favourite Glyndebourne opera? Of course not – she has five: '*Porgy and Bess*, *Peter Grimes*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Giulio Cesare* and *Saul*.'



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