We hope that this Review provides a glimpse of the range and variety of Opera North’s work over the past twelve months and the breadth and diversity of the people we reach.

Our purpose is to create extraordinary experiences every day, putting music and opera to work to entertain, engage, challenge and inspire people of all ages and from all walks of life. These experiences encompass not only main stage theatre productions, which this year included our acclaimed Little Greats season of six short operas, but also the work of our boundary-breaking Projects department, epitomized by the Aéons sound walk commissioned by The Great Exhibition of the North, and our Education team, who now engage intensively with 2000 young people week in, week out throughout the year.

We are constantly seeking to redefine what it means to be an opera company in the 21st century, an aim that is reflected in the adaptability and versatility of our core ensembles of Chorus and Orchestra. This year, for example, members of the Chorus starred at the legendary City Varieties Music Hall in a show that explored the life and work of Kurt Weill, while the Orchestra took the spotlight in three outdoor concerts in Millennium Square in music ranging from club classics to a live film score.

We are committed to sharing opera and music with the broadest possible range of people in the north of England and beyond. We’ve reached audiences from Liverpool to Hull and from London to Ravenna. Through our partnership with The Space, Trouble in Tahiti – part of the Little Greats season – was filmed and made available to a global audience on demand by The Guardian and OperaVision, and broadcast by Sky Arts. You may have found us in one of the great concert halls of the North or in a shopping centre; online or on the banks of the Tyne.

Driving all that we do are the passion and dedication of our creative and highly skilled artistic, technical and administrative staff, who each year embrace new challenges with verve, determination and a dauntless company spirit. We’ve enhanced our Board of Trustees with the appointment of three new members, Henrietta Jowitt, Liza Kellett and Rosie Millard. Our financial performance has matched the strength of our artistic achievement. And as we celebrate our 40th anniversary in November we take a major step forward in our ambition to secure the future of opera in the North with a landmark capital redevelopment project, Music Works. None of this would be possible without the crucial investment of Arts Council England and Leeds City Council and the generosity of our many supporters – as well, of course, as the passion of our audiences.

Paul Lee
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Richard Mantle
General Director

Covers: Kiss Me, Kate, 2018
These pages: Underworld, Light Night, Howard Assembly Room, 2017
'Always enterprising and, bravely, ready to be different'
Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*, on The Little Greats, September 2017

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Extraordinary experiences

Whether it’s a buccaneering theatre season of short operas, club classics played with live orchestra in the middle of Leeds, or an immersive sound installation on the banks of the Tyne – Opera North creates extraordinary experiences every day.

Public performances presented by Opera North
'Just experienced the AEONS sound walk along Newcastle quayside, part of getnorth2018. It’s a spa for the brain. The music – a symphony for the Tyne – by Opera North is calming & inspiring, deliberately slowing you down to take in the sights & sounds and poetry. Go and do it.'

Bernard Donoghue, Mayor of London’s Culture Ambassador, via Twitter, on Aeons, part of Great Exhibition of the North

‘Working on the Little Greats season in 2017 was a stimulating and rewarding experience. Over the past 30 years I have worked at Opera North as a director, set and lighting designer, and it remains the most serious-minded and clearly motivated of opera companies in my experience. The Little Greats project represented all that is vital to the Company’s attitude to the artform. Opera North’s aim to bring a new audience to opera is at the heart of all its work, and I’m thrilled that Trouble in Tahiti was filmed and presented online, so that even more people – my Mum included – can see it too!’

Charles Edwards, Set and Lighting Designer The Little Greats; Director Pagliacci

‘The modern-dress setting and rehearsal ambience work brilliantly’

Hugh Canning, Sunday Times, on Pagliacci
For everyone

From grand theatres to shopping centres; from community venues to city squares; from the local pub to the global digital arena, Opera North is reaching ever more diverse audiences, with more than 100,000 attendances at our performances over the course of the year.

‘Dear Opera North – I just wanted to thank you for one of the best nights of my life last night. My friend and I went to Leeds Grand Theatre to see two amazing shows for £20 . . . both amazing but particularly Cavalleria rusticana – loved, loved, loved it – the passion, humour, emotion – everything. I am now an opera convert and can’t wait to go see another!’
Little Greats audience member

‘Above all else, the aspect that I liked most about the trip was that we were able to perform to younger audiences and expose them to opera and share our passion for it, which I strongly believe is vital if we are to keep this wonderful art in existence in the future.’
Member of the Opera North Youth Chorus on participating in the GrowOP! Opera Festival for children and young people in Denmark

‘Just wanted to thank everyone involved in making the Aeons walk so fantastic. All my family from 9 to 74 years loved it and were fully immersed in the soundscape.’
Phil Goldblatt

‘It is sad that people assume opera is only aimed at wealthy people with a lot of education. It isn’t. I wish more people from working class backgrounds could go and see that opera is there for everyone. It can be clever, funny, tragic, all in half an hour.’
Participant, Making Space – one of the 106 community groups and organisations in Opera North’s Encore scheme
Between September 2017 and August 2018 there were:

146,926
Total attendances nationwide of an Opera North show, concert, event

6,113
Members of Under 30s scheme

43%
New Opera North attenders at Madama Butterfly

3,455
Mentions in the press

373,843
Unique visitors to the Opera North website

6,590,629
Cross-platform video views

6,500
Miles walked by visitors experiencing Aeons: A Sound Journey for Newcastle

10,000th
Attendance through the Opera North Community Engagement project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Below: Audience at Madama Butterfly, February 2018
Opposite top: The Orchestra of Opera North performs The Symphonic Sounds of Back to Basics in Millennium Square, Leeds, July 2018
Opposite bottom: Opera North touch tour at Leeds Grand Theatre, January 2018
Communities

Opera North connects with communities and inspires people of all ages and walks of life to explore opera, music and the arts. Thousands of young people and adults engage with the Company’s extensive education programmes each year.

2,000
Children and young people attended regular weekly Education activity in 2017-18
Whistle Stop Opera

Whistle Stop takes opera out of its more conventional settings and into a wide variety of community venues. Half-hour interactive performances given by a small company of professional singers accompanied by accordion are followed by a Q&A with the performers. Whistle Stop offers a light-hearted yet probing introduction to opera for those who would not normally have access to the artform.

Whistle Stop operas in recent years have included The Elixir of Love, Hansel and Gretel and, in Autumn 2017, a specially-devised Opera in a Nutshell, which featured in the BBC’s nationwide #OperaPassion Day. In February and March 2018, a #MeToo-inspired Whistle Stop Don Giovanni toured to 27 locations in Leeds, Hull, Nottingham, Newcastle, Salford and Manchester. Venues included unused shopping centre units, care homes and a work canteen. In Leeds alone, nearly 800 people attended eighteen Whistle Stop Don Giovanni performances.

‘When the chance came up I thought “Well, I’ll give it a go”. And I did, and it was, like, awesome. And I suppose for me, like everybody else who lives round here who doesn’t have access to the theatre because it’s really expensive, it’s made me aware that opera can be real fun’
Resident, Thornton Estate, Hull, on Whistle Stop Opera Don Giovanni

The Big Sing: World War One

Between March and July 2018 Opera North Education worked with children in Years 3-7 and their teachers on The Big Sing: World War One. This participatory project was designed to build a positive attitude to singing and musical activities and to increase self-esteem and self-confidence in the children, as well as improving teamwork and collaboration. It was anticipated that 500 children would participate in The Big Sing: World War One; in fact, the total was 900. The project culminated in public performances in venues in Leeds, Doncaster, Alnwick, Hull and Barnsley.

‘I have learnt that when you sing you don’t just need to open your mouth – you need to express yourself’
Samara, Mallard Primary School, Doncaster

‘One of the students suffers from anxiety. She has happily taken part in the concert and trip and has grown in confidence throughout the project’
Teacher, Balby Carr Community Academy, Doncaster
Shaping the future

Opera North leads the way in championing opera as a vital, ever-evolving artform. The Company nurtures and develops the talents of an extraordinary range of established and emerging artists from around the world to produce ambitious, often boundary-breaking work – from music-theatre to film scores to sound installations – which we share in new and innovative ways.

Left: Wallis Giunta as Dinah in *Trouble in Tahiti*, part of the Little Greats season of six short operas, Autumn 2017 – one of three roles Wallis sang for the Company during the year. She subsequently won the Young Singer of the Year award at the 2018 International Opera Awards.

A film of Matthew Eberhardt’s production of *Trouble in Tahiti* was commissioned by The Space to coincide with the Bernstein centenary celebrations in 2018. Made fully accessible for D/deaf and hard of hearing, and blind and partially-sighted audiences, with BSL interpretation, audio-description and captioning, the film was made available on demand by The Guardian and Operavision, and broadcast by Sky Arts.

Opposite:
Top left: Martin Green
Centre left: National Opera Studio residency, November 2017
Centre right: Circuit des Yeux/Salomé, May 2018
Bottom: The Pied Piper of Chibok, part of Opera North’s Resonance residency programme for BAME composers and music-makers, March 2018
In Summer 2018, Opera North Projects was commissioned by the Great Exhibition of the North to create Aeons, a journey in sound along the River Tyne through the heart of Newcastle. With music by composer and accordionist Martin Green (Lau), recorded by the Chorus and Orchestra of Opera North, Aeons also featured the vocals of Becky Unthank, Mogwai’s Dominic Aitchison and binaural field recordings made along the river.

‘It’s no exaggeration to say that working with Opera North Projects has changed my professional and creative existence in a profound and tangible way. They gave me my first experience in making multi-dimensional work with the commissioning of Crows’ Bones in 2012. It has been an absolute joy to return to their endlessly encouraging team for the making of Aeons. All my experiences of Opera North as commissioners have been of an organisation keen to nurture and to challenge, whilst being consistently supportive with advice and resources.’

Martin Green

To complement concert performances of Richard Strauss’s Salome in Spring 2018, Opera North Projects commissioned Haley Fohr and Circuit des Yeux to create a new original soundtrack to the 1932 silent movie Salomé. Performances at the Howard Assembly Room and the Barbican in London in May were followed in August by dates at National Sawdust in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago.

‘Opera North was able to create the ideal environment for a working composer. Our collaboration was conducted with the utmost hospitality in a focused, creative atmosphere – all of which enabled me to successfully create an original piece of art. It shines in my mind as one of the most successful collaborations of my career and has since helped me segue into new worlds of musical opportunity.’

Haley Fohr
Partnerships

From its base in Leeds, Opera North’s impact and influence extends throughout the North to the rest of the country and beyond. Our range and reach are underpinned by an array of powerful partnerships, in the public and private sectors, and with many individual supporters, trusts and foundations.

25 number of venues at which Opera North appeared between September 2017 and August 2018

Top: Dalia Stasevska conducts the Orchestra of Opera North during the Kirklees Concert Season at Huddersfield Town Hall, March 2018
Above: Samuel Hertz - Gunslinger, February 2018
Opposite Middle: Aeons, The Great Exhibition of the North, Newcastle Quayside, June 2018
Opposite Bottom Right: Whistle Stop Opera Don Giovanni at Trinity Leeds, February 2018
**Opera North and Kirklees Council**

Councillor Graham Turner, Portfolio Holder – Culture, Kirklees Council:  
‘For fifteen years, Opera North has worked with Kirklees Council as an important strategic partner to deliver our vision for Kirklees to become a cultural centre for music. We look forward to working with the Company for many more years. Together we have overcome significant hurdles to retain the Kirklees Concert Season across Huddersfield and Dewsbury for residents and visitors alike. Opera North has also taken a broader role in the wider development of our music sector, actively taking part within the district’s Music Development Group, whose remit is to deliver against our ambition of creating a world-class music offer and to achieve a transformative year of music in 2023.’

**DARE: Opera North and University of Leeds**

Professor John Ladbury, Dean of the Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Leeds  
Launched in 2017, the annual DARE Art Prize challenges artists and scientists to work together on new approaches to the creative process.  
John Ladbury: ‘The DARE Art Prize demonstrates that extraordinary things can emerge when different disciplines come together. The thinking and experiences of artists and scientists are often thought to be mutually exclusive, but the 215 collaborative proposals submitted for the DARE Prize over the past two years demonstrate that this is not the case and reveal the beauty and excitement of a symbiotic creative relationship between the two fields. The Prize, and the DARE partnership with Opera North, is enabling scientists at the University to think more creatively about their work.’

**Opera North and Emerald Publishing**

Keith Howard OBE, Emerald Publishing:  
‘In a partnership spanning twelve years, Opera North and Emerald Publishing have harnessed the power of music to transform the workplace and create meaningful employee engagement. By taking Opera North artists to Emerald’s offices, staff are immersed in the opera, before being welcomed back to the theatre to see the finished production. The launch of the Emerald Staff Choir in September 2017 not only celebrates our partnership but continues to deliver powerful outcomes around self-confidence and resilience, whilst inspiring creativity and supporting well-being.’

**Opera North and The Great Exhibition of the North**

Maria Bota, Creative Producer, Great Exhibition of the North:  
‘The Great Exhibition of the North shows and shares the difference the North is making to the world today and tomorrow and is designed to fire up the next generation, change perceptions of, and instil pride in, the North. Opera North’s *Aeons* delivers on every front: an innovative opera company working across genres with the inspiring music and accordion of Martin Green and the voices of Becky Unthank and Dominic Aitchison, drawing together ingenuity and technology to take their sound into the heart of the cityscape in order to create a transformational, personal and profoundly moving encounter, once experienced, not forgotten. Working with the excellent team at Opera North on bringing *Aeons* to Great Exhibition audiences has been nothing short of a joy.’

**Opera North and Trinity Leeds**

Dan Wharton, Marketing Manager, Trinity Leeds:  
‘Like Opera North, Trinity Leeds are passionate about making a positive impact on the communities in which we work. Since 2012 we have collaborated on innovative projects to engage and inspire new audiences and provide access to world-class music beyond the realms of the theatre. From exhilarating flashmobs in the shopping centre to intimate pop-up opera in an empty shop unit, our multi-platform digital coverage of these performances has extended the reach beyond Trinity’s footfall, to over 7 million to date. Delivering an outstanding celebration of Leeds City’s vibrant cultural and leisure heritage, our partnership also provides crucial support to Opera North’s transformative education programme, In Harmony.’
The breadth and sustained artistic quality of Opera North’s work in 2017/18 helped the company deliver a strong financial performance, enabling us to build on the operating reserve we established in the Financial Year 2015/16.

We continue to work to strengthen the Company’s financial resilience in order to ensure its stability and sustainability going forward. Expenditure was kept on a tight rein across all areas of the Company’s operation. Continued investment in our digital infrastructure and the operation of our own box office has better equipped us to capitalise on the excellent critical reception of our productions, enhanced our relationship with audiences, and improved customer service.

With the full support of Leeds City Council we have in the past year begun work on a major capital redevelopment project to transform Opera North’s base in the city and to enhance the cultural offer of the Howard Assembly Room. We have already received substantial private and public support and will launch a major fundraising campaign in Autumn 2018 to fully realise the ambition of the scheme.
Acknowledgements

Opera North gratefully acknowledges all the organisations and over 1,000 individuals across the country who generously support the Company’s work.

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Tom Arber (Underworld, pp2-3; Kiss Me, Kate in rehearsal, p4; Opera North Children’s Chorus – The Spider’s Revenge, p5; Opera North touch tour at Leeds Grand Theatre, audience at Madama Butterfly, p6; The Kingdom Under the Sea, p8; Whistle Stop Opera, p9; Smart Banda (Resonance – The Pied Piper of Chibok, p11); Clive Bards (Un ballo in maschera, p4); Ben Bentley (Circuit des Yeux – Salomé, p11); Malcolm Johnson (National Opera Studio residency, p11); Tristram Kenton (Kiss Me, Kate, covers; Pagliacci, p5); Richard Kenworthy (Aeons – The Great Exhibition of the North, p13); Alastair Muir (Trouble in Tahiti, p10); James Mulkeen (Big Sing, Doncaster, p9); Opera North (Tony Allen, p4; Samuel Hertz – Gundersn, p12; Whistle Stop Opera Don Giovanni, p13); Ant Robling (Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill, p5); Justin Slee (Les Amazones d’Afrique, p5); Opera North Children’s Chorus in rehearsal, p9; Dalia Stasevskia, p12); Smile for Life (Opera North Children’s Chorus, p8); Genevieve Stevenson (Martin Green, p11); Robert Workman (Salome, p5); Sarah Zagni (The Symphonic Sounds of Back to Basics, p6).