



# EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



**FESTIVAL 2015  
OPERA INSIGHTS**

# A GOTHIC FAIRYTALE FLUTE

---

**David Kettle explores Barrie Kosky and 1927's magical reinvention of Mozart's *The Magic Flute***

---

Giant bone spiders, Buster Keaton, lifts to the underworld, Nosferatu, flappers, wolves – if you have any preconceptions about opera, *The Magic Flute* from Berlin's Komische Oper will almost certainly overturn them.

It's a production like no other, faithful to Mozart's wild fairytale creation, yet gleefully inventive in the way it presents it, using a striking mix of traditional opera singers and enormous animated projections. And that's down to the involvement of UK-based theatre company 1927, who joined the Komische Oper's artistic director Barrie Kosky in putting the show together. 'What we do is mix animation and live performance,' explains 1927's co-artistic director Suzanne Andrade. 'Barrie had seen one of our previous shows, particularly some scenes that are done in a kind of gothic fairytale style, and he thought it would be amazing to do *The Magic Flute* like that.'

During its three-year production process, the gothic fairytale style – experienced to huge acclaim in 1927's earlier Edinburgh Fringe hits *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* and *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets* – broadened out to take in silent cinema, with opera librettist Schikaneder's troublesome spoken dialogues cunningly replaced by silent-movie text plates, for example, and birdman Papageno rethought as a Buster Keaton-style figure. Most striking, though, is Andrade's radical reimaging of the wicked Queen of the Night. 'I remember sitting at home and thinking: let's turn her into a giant bone spider who can strike lightning at various points during her famous aria.' Along with the sinister Monostatos as Nosferatu and the eponymous flute

transfigured into a Tinkerbell-style cherub, it's one of the show's most memorable transformations.

The production – originally unveiled in Berlin in 2012 – has enjoyed enormous success, touring to Minnesota and Los Angeles as well as within Germany and Austria, and there are tours to China, Finland and Spain in the pipeline. 'Many *Magic Flutes* are either terribly banal children's theatre or high-concept productions that can be long and hard-going,' says Kosky. 'This one is entirely different, and you get entire families coming, as well as opera aficionados who know they'll be surprised at every aria.'

'We wanted the audiences to really like it,' continues Andrade. 'We knew there might be people who didn't, but if people want to go to a traditional version with Papageno in his bird suit, there are thousands of versions like that.' There's no denying that this reboot of Mozart's most magical opera is innovative, provocative – and utterly unique.

**David Kettle** is a freelance writer and editor

---

## THE MAGIC FLUTE

---

Thu 27, Fri 28, Sun 30 Aug 7.15pm; Sat 29 Aug 5pm  
Festival Theatre  
Tickets £18-£76  
[eif.co.uk/magicflute](http://eif.co.uk/magicflute)

---

Supported by

**Dunard Fund**

---





# BOUNDARY- BLURRING OPERA

---

**Iván Fischer directs and conducts a very special version of *The Marriage of Figaro***

---

What to call it? Not a semi-staging, exactly: Iván Fischer, founder and music director of the Budapest Festival Orchestra, says he hates the term because 'semi' suggests half-heartedness, and the visionary Hungarian conductor doesn't do anything by halves. The phrase 'concert staging' has also been touted, but any notion of regular concert formality would be equally misleading. There are no sets, the orchestra sits on stage, the singers begin in their street clothes – and still the New York Times called it 'an insightful dramatic take on a complex opera' and 'a remarkable production'.

In recent years Fischer has been tackling Mozart operas as double-duty director and conductor. 'It's nothing to do with ego or arrogance,' he insists, 'though I get that criticism all the time. I don't really care. What concerns me is the unity of music and theatre.' He speaks of 'a norm in today's opera world where directors feel a responsibility to be innovative and conductors are like high priests of conservative values, doggedly sticking to the score.' By taking on both roles, he aims to make what he calls 'an organic opera performance where theatre and music express absolutely the same thing.'

*The Marriage of Figaro* is an ideal candidate for the treatment. The thrust of the drama's emotional energy is in the orchestral score – just think of the fizzing, scheming overture – plus there's the politics of it. Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte based their opera on a Beaumarchais play that had been banned by the French monarchy for its subversive class dynamics. Fischer's production (let's just call it a production) sees characters wandering among the orchestra, reaching for

costumes that transform them from man to woman, aristocrat to servant. 'I like the idea of them being a messy crowd,' says Fischer. 'A chaotic household where class boundaries are blurred'. With orchestra, conductor and singers all together on stage, musical hierarchies are similarly blurred. Fischer founded the BFO as a free-market experiment in 1980s communist Hungary. For him, music and politics rarely drift far.

All that aside, the major benefit of putting the BFO on stage is the chance to revel in the plush and deeply charismatic sound this orchestra makes. A vibrant cast is led by Hanno Müller-Brachmann as Figaro, Markus Werba as a dangerously suave Count, Ekaterina Siurina as Susanna and the gracious, generously lyrical soprano Miah Persson as the Countess. It's an ensemble worth hearing even with your eyes closed. Just don't call it a semi-staging.

**Kate Molleson** is a music critic for The Herald

---

## THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

---

Thu 13, Sat 15, Sun 16 Aug 7pm, Festival Theatre  
Tickets £16-£68, [eif.co.uk/figaro](http://eif.co.uk/figaro)

---

Funded by

**James and Morag Anderson**  
through the Edinburgh International Festival Opera  
Development Fund



# FRENCH BAROQUE AT ITS BEST

Rameau and Charpentier offer us a rare glimpse into the splendours of French Baroque Opera

They liked things spectacular and opulent at the court of Louis XIV – just think of the Baroque magnificence of the Palace of Versailles. Equally spectacular in its own way is Charpentier's opera *Médée*, which the French king saw at its premiere in Paris's Théâtre du Palais-Royal in 1693 and greatly admired. It's easy to see why: with its bloodthirsty tale of love, jealousy and pitiless revenge set to some of the French Baroque's most intense, dramatic music, the opera is as powerful today as it was more than three centuries ago.

Which makes it all the more astonishing that the work lay neglected after its first performances (mainly down to politics and favouritism in the French opera world) until conductor William Christie, surely today's leading expert in the French Baroque, unearthed it and recorded it in 1994. It's Christie who brings an abridged concert performance of the opera to this year's Festival, with singers from his revered Les Arts Florissants ensemble – including soprano Emmanuelle De Negri, tenor Reinoud Van Mechelen and bass Marc Mauillon – joining the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Written almost a century later, Rameau's joyful opera *Les Boréades* makes an equally vivid and similarly Greek myth-inspired companion piece, describing the Queen of Bactria angering the gods with her love for a mortal rather than for one of their kind. Together the two operas provide a rare glimpse into the splendours and striking theatricality of early French opera, offering an evening of sumptuous vocal and instrumental delights, courtesy of some of today's most accomplished performers in the field.

**David Kettle**

## RAMEAU & CHARPENTIER

Mon 10 Aug 9pm  
Usher Hall  
Tickets £12-£38  
[eif.co.uk/rameau-charpentier](http://eif.co.uk/rameau-charpentier)

# TIMELESS SATIRE

---

Ken Walton examines the enduring appeal  
of Gilbert and Sullivan

---

Are the operettas of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan outdated curiosities of a bygone era, or enduring masterpieces of social and political satire?

Given the upsurge in recent stagings by major UK opera companies, and the popular success of these, there seems to be no question: G&S is a timeless phenomenon.

But how can that be? With storylines that are silly, absurd and fuelled by pompous Victorian humour – not to mention lines that might not appeal to 21st century political correctness – why do we still find audiences chortling with laughter at Gilbert's pokes at the establishment and Sullivan's tongue-in-cheek musical parodies.

Take the classic example of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, which Scottish Opera will present in concert at the Usher Hall. A lowly sailor, Ralph, loves the Captain's daughter, but her father's sights are on her marrying the completely useless First Lord of the Admiralty. To cut a long story short, it transpires that Ralph and the Captain were carelessly mixed up at birth, so the social hierarchy goes farcically topsy turvy and Ralph gets his girl.

More interesting are Gilbert's satirical slaughtering of Admiralty supremo Sir Joseph Porter, whose ineptitude rivals that of Jim Hacker in the 1980s BBC television series *Yes Minister*. And that's the rub. Satirical targets,

particularly among politicians and the nobility, have remained fairly constant throughout history, as have the satirists, as well as those who flock to see and hear it performed over and over again.

But a little contemporisation always helps. Which is where English comic actor, Tim Brooke-Taylor comes in. A former member of the comic team *The Goodies*, he will bring additional narrative to Edinburgh, which catapults Gilbert's acid prose into the modern day, while keeping those hummable Sullivan tunes just the way we've always liked them.

**Ken Walton** is Classical Music Critic for *The Scotsman*

---

## H.M.S. PINAFORE

---

Sun 23 Aug 5pm, Usher Hall  
Tickets £12-£44, [eif.co.uk/pinafore](http://eif.co.uk/pinafore)

---

Sponsored by





# MORE THAN A SONG

---

**Herald theatre critic Neil Cooper explains why writer Enda Walsh's foray into music isn't such a surprise**

---

There has always been a musical pulse to Enda Walsh's writing, ever since the Dublin-born playwright burst onto the international stage in 1996 with *Disco Pigs*, his ferocious teenage love story that turned a nineteen-year Cillian Murphy into a star. The rhythmic rush of adolescent slang that fired Walsh's career-making play has led to a prolific canon both on stage and screen.

Walsh's script written with Steve McQueen for McQueen's Michael Fassbender-starring film, *Hunger*, was praised, while a move into musical theatre with *Once* saw the Broadway production of a show featuring music and lyrics by Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglová scoop eight Tony Awards, a Grammy and two Olivier Awards.

Furthering his relationship with music, Walsh is currently under commission to write *Jules in the City*, a film based on the life and times of singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright, a man himself no stranger to combining music and theatre. Then there is a mooted collaboration between Walsh and David Bowie, no less, which will see the pair work together on *Lazarus*, a new musical play set to be premiered in New York later this year. *Lazarus* is based on Walter






---

## THE LAST HOTEL

Sat 8, Mon 10 Tue 11 & Wed 12 Aug 8pm  
 Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh  
 Tickets £12-£35  
[eif.co.uk/lasthotel](http://eif.co.uk/lasthotel)

Supported by



Culture Ireland  
 Cultúr Éireann

Léan Scully EIF Fund

Tevis' science-fiction novel, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, which was famously filmed by Nicolas Roeg in 1976, with Bowie himself playing the lead role of an emigre alien.

With such a lively music-based back catalogue, Walsh's first foray into opera with *The Last Hotel* is a seamlessly natural move for this most restlessly experimental of writers. Set in a hotel full of fly-by-night comings and goings and potentially dangerous liaisons, *The Last Hotel* looks at matters of life and an inevitable death with a prevailing sense of unease that often lurks behind the nervous energy of Walsh's work.

*The Last Hotel* also sees Walsh reunited with Irish composer Donnacha Dennehy, who he first worked with on his solo play, *Misterman*, again performed by Murphy. Dennehy is co-founder of the twelve-strong

contemporary music-based Crash Ensemble, who perform Walsh and Dennehy's savagely dark chamber noir in a presentation by Landmark Productions, the Irish theatre company behind *Once*, and Wide Open Opera.

The fact that all *The Last Hotel's* creatives are countrymen of Walsh's makes for a shared sensibility that should pay dividends in this new piece. Walsh's track record of exploring the often absurd extremes of the Irish psyche, after all, looks to the gallows humour of his literary forbears such as Beckett and Joyce whilst retaining a thoroughly twenty-first century sense of the ridiculous. This should see this new creation going for a lot more than a song. **Neil Cooper**

# ARCHLY WITTY OPERA

---

## Sir Andrew Davis tackles Stravinsky's darkly comic opera *The Rake's Progress*

---

British conductor Sir Andrew Davis must be dangerously close to receiving the dubious accolade of 'national treasure' – such is the energy and elegance of his seemingly tireless music-making across the globe, particularly in the British music for which he's so renowned.

He's a familiar and well-loved face in Edinburgh both during and outside Festival time, but he's been entertaining and enlightening Festival audiences for decades, recently with a glowing Delius *Mass of Life* with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra at the 2012 Opening Concert, and with two powerful war-focused works last year: Britten's *War Requiem* with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Australian Percy Grainger's raucous *The Warriors*.

That last performance was with Grainger's compatriots in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the ensemble currently under Davis's tutelage. But Davis is far from a stranger to the musical stage: he's been music director of Chicago's Lyric Opera since 2000 (with his contract recently extended until 2021), and he's a former music director at Glyndebourne.

And it's opera that he brings to this year's Festival: Stravinsky's archly witty *The Rake's Progress*, a darkly comic morality tale based on Hogarth images that traces the fortunes of Tom Rakewell as he deserts his steadfast companion Anne Trulove for a life of debauchery and excess with the devilish Nick Shadow. It's a crisp, Mozart-inspired score, radically ear-pleasing for a work written just after the Second World War, and shot through with Stravinsky's trademark rhythmic verve. Performing alongside the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Davis has a fine international cast, including young British tenor Andrew Staples as Tom and the powerful bass baritone Gidon Saks as the demonic Nick Shadow. 'The Devil makes work for idle hands' is the opera's infamous conclusion – hardly a warning that the indefatigable and in-demand Davis needs to heed. **David Kettle**



---

## THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

---

Wed 12 August 7.30pm

Usher Hall

Tickets £12-£44

[elf.co.uk/rakes](http://elf.co.uk/rakes)

---

Supported by

**The Stevenston Charitable Trust**



Image A Rake's Progress by William Hogarth

# FIERY FESTIVAL FINALE!

Festival 2015 concludes with a spectacular concert, with fireworks launched from Edinburgh's iconic Castle to music inspired by dance from Strauss, Brahms and Dvořák, performed live by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

## VIRGIN MONEY FIREWORKS CONCERT

Monday 31 August 9.30pm  
[eif.co.uk/virginmoneyfireworks](http://eif.co.uk/virginmoneyfireworks)

Sponsored by



Photo: Clark James

## BOOK YOUR FESTIVAL 2015 TICKETS NOW AND ENJOY UNMISSABLE WORLD-CLASS MUSIC AND OPERA THIS SUMMER!



Follow us @EdintFest



Like us



Subscribe to our channel



Follow us @EdintFest



Subscribe to our Spotify channel

### STANDBY – HALF PRICE

From Wednesday 29 July  
50% off all tickets for senior citizens, unemployed people, Equity and MU card holders.

### ARE YOU UNDER 26?

Pay only £8 on the day for selected performances.

### YOUNG PEOPLE AND STUDENTS – HALF PRICE NOW!

Under 18s, Young Scot cardholders and all students in full time education.

### ACCESS DISCOUNTS

Call the access booking line on **0131 473 2089** or visit [eif.co.uk/access](http://eif.co.uk/access).

**EIF.CO.UK**  
**0131 473 2000**

Charity No SC004694. Front cover image: Iko Freese

• EDINBURGH •  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL