

PRESS RELEASE
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Forces veterans discover opera in Opera Holland Park's latest moving film *Into the Light*



UK forces veterans, their mental health and music are the subjects of a new short film by Opera Holland Park (OHP), released today: <https://youtu.be/dc8JNouFfEQ>
Three veterans: Mac, Ian and Tina, all of whom have suffered varying mental and physical health problems including PTSD, were taken on a journey into opera in the same vein as that of two other recent award-winning films by OHP.

OHP is renowned for its accessibility, introducing people to the world of opera, breaking down barriers and demolishing stereotypes. Following the heartwarming and startling conversions of old-school Chelsea fans to the art form in *Footy to Verdi* and eight teenagers from south London in *Hip Hop to Opera*, OHP took on its toughest challenge yet in *Into the Light*.

Michael Volpe, General Director of OHP and the director of the films explains:

“The first two films turned out to be less about opera itself than about the role that culture and widening horizons can have on individual lives. *Hip Hop to Opera* centred around the social and cultural aspirations of young people and how successful challenging themselves could be.

“In our latest film, *Into the Light*, we wanted to explore the role of music and new experiences in the recovery of people who have suffered significant trauma and are working hard at getting their lives back on track after really difficult experiences. Music won't heal you on its own, of course, but new experiences and the dramatic stories in opera can help us re-evaluate our own lives and who we are.”

All three of the film's participants live at Stoll Mansions in Fulham, a charity that houses veterans, supports them in their recovery and helps them back into civilian life. The three are:

Mac – an Army veteran who served in Iraq among other places, suffering injuries to his knees. Mac is a heavy metal fan and is involved in parasports. He is also an accomplished sports photographer. Mac was diagnosed with PTSD several years after being medically discharged from the Army.

Ian – another Army veteran who served in Northern Ireland. Ian has taken up painting and, like Mac, only received a diagnosis of PTSD several years after leaving the Army.

Tina – a Royal Navy veteran who also spent several years living in Italy. Tina has survived traumatic domestic abuse.

All of the film's participants battle mental health difficulties but deal with them in differing ways. All describe a time when they struggled in life, with two of them suffering homelessness, alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts and deep feelings of failure and diminished self-worth. Critically, all of them say that it took them a long time to realise that they were suffering from mental health issues until they sought help.

In the film, the three veterans visit a rehearsal studio to hear opera up-close for the first time, before attending the public dress rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* at Opera Holland Park. Apart

from Tina, who encountered some opera during her time living in Italy, the veterans had no experience of opera at all. For Ian, in particular, this was a turning point.

Michael Volpe comments on their journey:

“As always with these films, we never quite knew how it would turn out. The first day of filming and interviews was very powerful as we listened to the veterans’ stories. We simply wanted to take them on a voyage of discovery, to see if the visceral, transporting experience of live opera would help them reflect on their lives and see a way of bringing beautiful music and drama into their world. We didn’t quite expect how it DID turn out but it was yet more evidence of how, with just the smallest opening of the mind, dramatic things can occur.”

Into the Light is available to watch from 25 October on YouTube and Amazon Prime:

<https://youtu.be/dc8JNouFfEQ>

Those wanting to experience the power of opera for themselves can attend a performance at Opera Holland Park for as little as £22 – and there are even some free ticket schemes. For more details about OHP’s 2020 Season visit www.operahollandpark.com

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