



Opera Holland Park announces a new commission for 2023

Press Release

2pm on Monday 7 March

An operatic thriller with a most unusual hero

Opera Holland Park is delighted to announce a new commission and world premiere for 2023: *Itch*. Based on Simon Mayo's bestselling novels *Itch* and *Itch Rocks*, composer Jonathan Dove and librettist Alasdair Middleton have been commissioned to create a new opera for Opera Holland Park. Its hero is Itchingham Holte, a teenage scientist on a mission to collect all the elements in the periodic table.

Described as '*Breaking Bad* for kids' by NPR in America, the *Itch* books explore the magical properties of the elements through an adventure story of explosive proportions as the young hero tries to outrun a vindictive teacher, a global corporation and a shadowy government agency in his quest to save the world. Dove, whose 1998 opera *Flight* was produced by Opera Holland Park in 2015, and Middleton, the librettist of five of Dove's operas, have identified a story "full of intense feelings, which is where opera thrives", and point to the Nordic legend of *The Ring* as a parallel adventure of discovery, peril and return - but with science as the source of the magic. Move over, Siegfried. *Itch* is here!

James Clutton, CEO and Director of Opera Holland Park, says:

"I am thrilled to commission a new opera from Jonathan and Alasdair, especially as we emerge from the difficulties of the last two years. When I read Simon's novel I was immediately struck by the potential to create something truly exciting for the stage. After the great success of our 2013 commission for children, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it gives me enormous pleasure to be commissioning a work that will appeal to everyone, young and old."

BIOGRAPHIES

Simon Mayo – Author

Simon Mayo is a mainstay of UK radio, hosting a daily national show since 1987 on BBC Radio 1, Radio 2, 5Live and Scala Radio. His award-winning film review show with Mark Kermode has been running since 2001. He is also the host of the Books of the Year podcast. Simon is also the author of the best-selling *Itch* trilogy (*Itch*, *Itch Rocks*, *Itchcraft*). *Itch* has been filmed by the ABC for television, debuting in Australia in 2019, then the UK and USA in 2020. His other books include *Mad Blood Stirring*, *Blame* and *Knife Edge*.

Alasdair Middleton – Librettist

Alasdair's work as a librettist includes: with Jonathan Dove – *The Monster in the Maze* (Berliner Philharmoniker, London Symphony Orchestra, Aix-en-Provence Festival), *Diana and Actaeon* (Royal Ballet), *Seasons and Charms* (Aldeburgh Festival), *The Walk From The Garden* (Aegeas Salisbury International Arts Festival), *Life Is A Dream* (Birmingham Opera), *Mansfield Park* (Heritage Opera),



Swanhunter (Opera North), *The Enchanted Pig* (The Young Vic, ROH2), *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Opera North), and the cantata *On Spital Fields* (Spitalfields Festival, winner of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award).

Other works include: *Elizabeth* (ROH), *Pinocchio* (National Ballet of Canada, Texas Balletcs), *The Secret Garden* (Sarasota Ballet), *Pleasure's Progress* (ROH2), *Who Is This That Comes* (Opera North) and *The Crane Maiden* (KAAT Yokohama). *The World Was All Before Them*, *On London Fields* (winner of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award), *A Bird In Your Ear* (New York City Opera), *The North Wind Was A Woman* (A Song Cycle for Dawn Upshaw), *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (Danish National Opera), *Everything Money Can Buy* (Selfridges) and *The Feathered Friend*. Alasdair has also written four plays.

Jonathan Dove – Composer

Jonathan Dove is the most widely-performed living opera composer in the UK, and among the five most performed in the world. He has consistently explored what opera can be, and what audiences it can reach. His breakthrough opera, the airport comedy *Flight*, has enjoyed more than thirty productions internationally. His first television opera, *When She Died*, was seen by over two million people. *The Monster in the Maze*, a community opera co-commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and the Festival International d'Art Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence, was premiered in Berlin, London and Aix under Sir Simon Rattle and won a British Composer Award. It has had twelve productions in its first five years, in English, French, German, Portuguese, Catalan, Swedish and Chinese/Taiwanese. A Dutch production has been temporarily halted by Covid-19.

Ten of Dove's 29 operas were written with Alasdair Middleton, in a collaboration stretching over more than 20 years which also includes ballet, music-theatre, song-cycles and choral works. Several of their operas are for a family audience. The first production of *The Enchanted Pig* had 150 performances in the UK and US. It was followed by *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, which won a British Composer Award. The opera Jonathan has written with Alasdair Middleton include: *The Hackney Chronicles* (2001), *The Enchanted Pig* (2006), *An Old Way to Pay New Debts* (2006), *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (2007), *Swanhunter* (2009), *Seven Angels* (2010), *Mansfield Park* (2011), *Life is a Dream* (2012), *The Walk from the Garden* (2012), *The Monster in the Maze* (2015).

Jonathan Dove won the 2008 Ivor Novello Award for classical music. He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's 2019 Birthday Honours for services to music.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

2022 Season

New productions of the classic nineteenth-century tragedies ***Eugene Onegin*** and ***Carmen*** take us from the palaces of St Petersburg to the streets of Seville. The UK premiere of Mark Adamo's ***Little Women*** leads to progressive New England, where Jo March recalls her first love in the shadow of the American Civil War. A double bill of Delius's Parisian melodrama ***Margot la Rouge*** and Puccini's Gothic **fantasy *Le Villi*** contrasts a crime of passion with supernatural punishment, while a co-production of ***HMS Pinafore*** with Charles Court Opera proves that no one can mock English mores more successfully than the English themselves. The City of London Sinfonia returns as resident orchestra for all five productions.



Curated by Julien van Mellaerts and Dylan Perez, the **Opera in Song** series returns with an expanded programme of six recitals to include a portrait of Carmen in song, a celebration of female composers and librettists, a survey of classic and classical American songs, and three programmes of Schubert song cycles given fresh contexts in poetry and music. **The Royal Ballet School** also returns for their summer performances.

In 2021 Opera Holland Park unveiled a reimagined auditorium and performance space to reflect the natural beauty of the theatre's setting and to allow for social distancing. Constructed from reclaimed and sustainable materials and designed in collaboration with takis, it was described in The Guardian as 'a well-nigh ideal solution' to the challenges imposed by the pandemic.

In 2022 the total capacity will remain flexible at approximately 700 seats with improved sightlines and additional levels, using the same footprint and aesthetic. Sustainability informs every aspect of the theatre, with food and drink predominantly sourced from independent companies within a 50 mile radius of Holland Park for purchase by patrons.

For more information, including casting and performance dates, visit www.operahollandpark.com.

General Booking for the 2022 Season opens on Wednesday 6 April, 10am.

Images and other media

A short trailer introducing the theatre for 2022 can be accessed [here](#).

Website and social media

www.operahollandpark.com

www.facebook.com/operahollandpark

www.twitter.com/operahollandpk

www.instagram.com/operahollandpark

www.youtube.com/operahollandpark

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