



GARSINGTON OPERA  
AT WORMSLEY

## OVER 180 PEOPLE PERFORM IN ACTION-PACKED NEW WORK - *SILVER BIRCH*

Garsington Opera's thrilling new commission for the 2017 Season, *Silver Birch*, will feature over 180 participants from the local community aged 8-80, including students from primary and secondary schools, members of the local military community, student Foley artists under the guidance of Pinewood Studios and members of Wycombe Women's Aid. Appearing alongside top professional singers and orchestral players, they will perform as dancers, singers, actors and instrumentalists. Garsington Opera's Artistic Director **Douglas Boyd** will conduct and collaborate with the dynamic female creative team of leading British composer **Roxanna Panufnik**, novelist and journalist **Jessica Duchon** (librettist), Creative Director of Garsington's Learning and Participation programme **Karen Gillingham** (director), movement director **Natasha Khamjani**, vocal director **Suzi Zumpe**, designer **Rhiannon Newman Brown** and video designer **Mischa Ying**.

*Silver Birch*, a People's Opera, is a celebration of music, drama and poetry for all the family (aged 8+). It is a beautiful original story about courage and aspiration, centring on themes and issues of relationships and family ties which are tested when two boys go off to fight in a present-day war, while drawing upon Siegfried Sassoon's poetry for echoes of the past. Sassoon was a regular visitor to Garsington Manor in Oxfordshire during the First World War, and his great-nephew is taking part in the adult company of *Silver Birch*. The all-female creative team comes together at a time when opera, like the entertainment industry overall, has become increasingly aware of a lack of gender parity across all sectors of the industry.

Roxanna Panufnik is one of Britain's leading composers and daughter of Polish composer Andrezej Panufnik. She has written a wide range of pieces including opera, ballet, music theatre, choral works, chamber compositions and music for film and TV which are regularly performed all over the world and have been widely recorded.

MORE.....MORE.....MORE

PRESS RELEASE

Novelist and journalist Jessica Duchen has created a libretto which cleverly weaves together Siegfried Sassoon's poems and the testimony of a British soldier, who served recently in Iraq, to illustrate the human tragedies of conflicts past and present. *"It is not only the fulfilment of a dream; this creative process, deeply collaborative at every level, has been entirely new to me, and it's one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences I've been lucky enough to encounter,"* said Duchen. *"The theme is the impact of war on soldiers and their families, tying together Siegfried Sassoon's World War I poetry and the experiences of those serving in modern warfare. It is designed to appeal to opera regulars and first-time attenders alike. It is fast paced and action packed; emotions run high and Roxanna Panufnik has written some incredibly beautiful music, as well as letting her hair down a bit in the battle scene!"*

The Company has been selected from workshops and residencies throughout Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire where over 300 people were auditioned to take part. The Company includes a mix of 60 enthusiastic local adults, including 10 recruited from the military community. The 40 strong Youth Company aged between 10 and 20 come from over 25 different schools and colleges in Buckinghamshire and beyond, and the 50 youngsters forming the Primary Company from six local schools. Four child soloists share the key roles of siblings Leo and Chloe. With ideas created during the devising process by Sound and Music Consultant Jem Panufnik, a team of students from Cressex Community School will perform alongside the Sound Design team led by Glen Gathard and Foley artists from Pinewood Studios. In the orchestra pit, in partnership with Buckinghamshire Music Education Hub, a group of young local instrumentalists will have the opportunity to play specially written shadow parts, performing alongside the Garsington Opera Orchestra.

The professional roles will be performed by **Sam Furness** (Jack), **Victoria Simmonds** (Anna), **Darren Jeffery** (Simon), **Bradley Travis** (Sassoon), **Sarah Redgwick** (Mrs Morrell) and **James Way** (Davey) with the **Garsington Opera Orchestra**.

*Silver Birch* will be performed on the main stage of Garsington Opera at Wormsley on 28, 29, 30 July, start time 7.30pm.

Tickets from £5 [www.garsingtonopera.org](http://www.garsingtonopera.org) Telephone 01865 361636

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