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The Helen Astrid Singing Academy



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UK premiere of Philip Glass opera comes to London

The UK premiere of an opera by Philip Glass and Robert Moran is to be staged in London by **The Helen Astrid Singing Academy** in the spring in an innovative production which brings together professional musicians and singers with a community choir and children.

Helen Astrid has brought together an electric cast to stage ***The Juniper Tree*** as part of Richmond-upon-Thames' Music and Drama Festival in March 2017, in what will be Philip Glass' 80th year.

The opera is a "macabre tale with an unexpectedly happy ending", according to producer Helen Astrid. It is based on what has been described as "the grimmest of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales" – a story of how a young boy is killed by his wicked step-mother and fed to his unwitting father in a stew but later comes back to life.

The opera was composed by Glass and Moran, with a libretto by award-winning Arthur Yorinks, in 1985 and is one of the few operas by Glass in the English language!

It will be staged at The Hammond Theatre in Hampton, West London, on March 30th and 31st.

Producer and opera singer Helen Astrid, has performed in many contemporary as well as classical works and says she wants to create "avant-garde, accessible opera for the people".

"At the very heart of all my work are two crucial words: collaboration and transformation," she says.

"I'm passionate about transforming potential into reality and seeing people achieve more than they expected. That's the very essence of who I am. Having worked with several eminent British composers such as Mark-Anthony Turnage, Judith Weir, Nigel Osborne, Paul Patterson, Colin Mathews and Tansy Davies, I'm able to source the best team required. In ***The Juniper Tree***, we have such a team".

There is an electric line-up of singers including the outstanding Mariya Krywaniuk, James Corrigan and Rebecca Moon. The production will be directed by Donna Stirrup, who is currently touring with the Glyndebourne Festival Opera and also directs for English National Opera and the Royal Opera House. The conductor is Andy Langley, who conducts The Blackfriars Sinfonia and works with the Bach Choir and London Symphony Chorus. The orchestral ensemble will consist of top musicians from the Royal College of Music, London. Costume and Set Design will be by Laura Jane Stanfield.

Helen, who also runs choirs and teaches singing, is featuring the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames workplace choir, which she leads, as well as children from local schools in the borough: St James's Catholic Primary School, Hampton School, Lady Eleanor Holles School, in the production. Ten year old Lia Tynan, who has already performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and Angus Whitworth, head chorister at The Chapel Royal will be taking leading roles.

Conductor Andy Langley said: "Finding this little gem of an opera, written by one of our most popular and respected contemporary opera composers, was a joy. It's everything you'd ever want from an opera: drama, death, humour, hummable tunes - and even a happy ending - and all in just under 80 minutes! The fact that ***The Juniper Tree*** has never been performed in the UK is astounding. To conduct the UK premiere in Philip Glass' 80th birthday year with a top cast, crew and ensemble is a dream come true."

Helen Astrid is seeking sponsorship to stage this ground-breaking production. She added: "The aims of this project are to bridge a unique collaboration between young professionals and non-professionals to perform and work together as one. Bringing these diverse groups together, a new community is formed, building long lasting support and promoting emotional and social well-being.

"Our project combines a cultural experience for everyone, a developmental and educational voyage for children and a socially inclusive participatory event for the community. It's also a perfect chance for us to promote and enhance American culture in the United Kingdom."

Editor's notes:

- ***The Juniper Tree*** will be performed at The Hammond Theatre, Hampton, TW12 3HD on March 30 and 31 2017 at 7.30pm. Tickets are available here: www.thehammondtheatre.co.uk
- The Juniper Tree © 1985 Dunvagen Music Publishers Inc. Used by Permission.
- The Helen Astrid Singing Academy has been invited by the Music and Drama Festival 2017, Richmond-upon-Thames, to perform an extract from ***The Juniper Tree*** as the headline act at the Festival launch on Sunday 12th March 2017, 2.00pm at the Harlequins Stoop, Langhorn Drive, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW2 7SXT.
- Helen Astrid is available for interview. Please contact her at: Helen@TheHelenAstridSingingAcademy.Com or on +44 (0) 7710 245 904
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- More details about the Helen Astrid Singing Academy here: <http://thehenastridsingingacademy.com/>