

An **Opera Zuid** production in collaboration
with **Buxton International Festival**,
featuring the **Buxton International
Festival Orchestra**

BIF

Buxton
International
Festival



Passion, imagination, and authenticity are the driving forces behind every Opera Zuid production. Through our art we strive to create a profound social impact, offering audiences fresh, unexpected encounters with opera. Rooted in the South of the Netherlands yet traveling far beyond, Opera Zuid brings bold, accessible, and adventurous opera to the widest possible audience. With an innovative – sometimes unconventional –

approach, we forge connections across generations and communities, making opera an experience for all. From captivating productions for young audiences to boundary-pushing projects for seasoned opera lovers and first-time visitors alike, Opera Zuid embraces the full spectrum of human emotion. We invite everyone to discover opera's power in new and thrilling ways.

THE IMPRESARIO

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Libretto by Gottlieb Stephanie

An Opera Zuid production in collaboration with Buxton International Festival, featuring the Buxton International Festival Orchestra

Sung in German and Italian with English side-titles

First performance on 7 February 1786, Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna, Austria

DATES AND TIMES

Thursday 17 July	7.15pm–9.05pm
Monday 21 July	7.15pm–9.05pm
Thursday 24 July	2pm–3.50pm
Saturday 26 July	7.15pm–9.05pm

VENUE

Buxton Opera House

DURATION

110 minutes, including a 20-minute interval

OPERA TALKS

Thursday 17 July	6pm–6.30pm
Monday 21 July	6pm–6.30pm
Thursday 24 July	12.45pm–1.15pm
Saturday 26 July	6pm–6.30pm



Buxton Opera House

CREATIVES

Conductor

Conductor

Director

Associate Director

Set & Lighting Designer

Costume Designer

Repetiteur

Dame Jane Glover
(17 & 21 July)

Iwan Davies
(24 & 26 July)

Christopher Gillett

Joyce Henderson

Bretta Gerecke

Leo van den Boorn

Adam McDonagh

CAST

Richard McCabe

Joyce Henderson

Owain Rowlands

Jessica Hopkins

Dan D'Souza

Conor Prendiville

Nazan Fikret

Jane Burnell

Jamie MacDougall

Leo

Lisa

John/Pete

Evie/Beth

Buff

Monsieur Vogelsang

Madam Herz

Mademoiselle Silberklang

Rob/Dan

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Eleanor Corr (leader), Laura Custodio, John Smart, Hannah Bell, Paula Smart, Shirley Richards

Violin II

Simon Gilks, Rebecca Thompson, Cathy Studman, Jody Smith, James Pattinson

Viola

Alex Mitchell, Mike Dale, Henrietta Hill, Florence Corr

Cello

Graham Morris, Elliot Bailey, James Heathcote

Double Bass

James Manson, Diane Clark

Flute

Rosie Bowker, Karen Wong

Oboe

Rees Webster, Toby Hall

Clarinet

Sacha Rattle, Anton Clarke-Butler

Bassoon

Ben Hudson, Rachel Whibley

Horn

Naomi Atherton, Jenny Cox, Alex Hocknull

Trumpet

Tracey Redfern, Peter Mainwaring

Timpani

John Melbourne

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BACKGROUND

To enjoy *The Impresario* – or *Der Schauspieldirektor*, to give it its original title – it helps to have a healthy slice of context with a small dollop of history.

It isn't really an opera, and it never was. Mozart called it a 'comedy with music' – written when he was in the midst of composing *Le Nozze di Figaro* – and its first performance was for Emperor Joseph II and his court at the Schönbrunn Palace. Mozart's German singspiel was played at one end of a room and Salieri's Italian opera buffa *Prima la musica e poi le parole* at the other. It was a competition and Salieri, apparently, was the winner.

Mozart's original version is rarely performed because, aside from the overture and the four numbers that he composed, the rest of the 'comedy' is taken up with a sprawling play that makes little sense to an audience that isn't made up of 18th century Viennese courtiers. Few of the jokes would land these days, and there's a good half hour of dialogue before a singer enters, let alone utters a sound. At last, two sopranos audition with a spectacular but formal aria each, before the show hurries to its end with two ensembles. The title role (acted in Vienna by its librettist, Gottlieb Stephanie) doesn't sing a note.

It's a far cry from the previous Stephanie/Mozart collaboration, *Die Entführung*, and it was their last.

In 2022, the Dutch company Opera Zuid asked me to



take *Der Schauspieldirektor* and rework it; to keep the original music, but to expand Mozart's comedy and turn it into a ninety-minute entertainment, which we could just about call an 'opera'. Save for the very first line and the sung lyrics, I ditched all of Stephanie's archaic text. But I didn't want to lose some home truths about putting on an opera which are as relevant today as they were in Mozart's time. I also needed to find a way to add more music (*Figaro* was an obvious choice) while finding a dramatic path that both celebrated and poked fun at life in the opera house. I also wanted to keep all the singing in the original languages because, well, it's opera so why not?

Never having written anything like this before, I reached for copies of *Noises Off* and *Amadeus*; their influence will be obvious.

Christopher Gillett



REHEARSAL

SYNOPSIS

It is the year 1800.

After being awarded the contract to put on an opera, Leo, a fading impresario and devotee of Mozart, and Buff, Leo's assistant, are exploring their options when ... the actor playing Leo runs into problems with a prop. We are actually watching a present-day rehearsal of an opera. A last-minute replacement is jumping in to sing Madame Herz, but not to be outdone, the other diva, singing Madame Silberklang, has injured herself. Both show off their considerable vocal talents, as do Buff and a couple of young locals, and the rehearsal soldiers on in spite of several setbacks.

During the lunch break, the tenor who plays Vogelsang chats up the soprano playing his protégée Silberklang, but the tenor who is playing the tenor suddenly finds the plot too confusing and contrived ... because it turns out this isn't an opera about putting on an opera (which in itself is about putting on an opera); we are watching an opera about putting on an opera about putting on an opera (which in itself is about putting on an opera). Or is it a play? Who can tell? Least of all the cast. And the director of this mind-boggling show is William, the actor-manager who is playing Leo. The impresario is playing *The Impresario*. Only an opera could be this complex and ridiculous.

The soprano is flattered by the tenor's advances, but she has problems of her own to deal with and she expresses them, as you do in opera, by singing an aria.

They break for tea.

William has a meeting with the wunderkind director who will be staging a new *Magic Flute* for his theatre, but he is so appalled that he launches into a tirade against high-concept productions, musing about what it is that makes opera uniquely crazy yet beautiful. He realises this would be the perfect opportunity for him to express himself with a heartfelt aria but, frustratingly, he is just an actor; he has no singing voice. A trio appears and makes the point he cannot.

Buff returns. The two sopranos are fighting about which of them will be La Prima Donna, and Vogelsang is trying to calm them down. Leo lectures the company on what is truly important in the theatre – the audience – and he announces the opera they'll perform. Everyone sings in celebration of a timeless idea: that all artists want to excel, but they succeed best when they work together.



Dame Jane Glover

Conductor

Dame Jane Glover is Music Director of Chicago's Music of the Baroque and Principal Guest Conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony. Recent engagements include appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, conducting productions of *Don Giovanni* with New York's Metropolitan Opera and Houston Grand Opera, and the North American premiere of *Leonora* with Chicago Opera Theater. Future engagements include returns to the Chicago Symphony, Aspen Music Festival, and Florence's Maggio Musicale. Her

discography includes a series of Mozart and Haydn symphonies with the London Mozart Players and recordings of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Britten, and Walton with the London Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic, and the BBC Singers. She is the author of the critically acclaimed books *Mozart's Women*, *Handel in London* and *Mozart in Italy*. In 2020 she was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gamechanger Award for her work in breaking new ground for other female conductors.

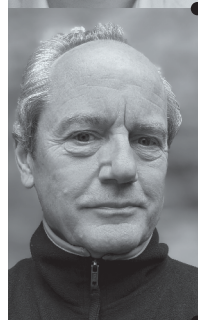


Iwan Davies

Conductor

Iwan Davies is Artistic Director of Aberystwyth Musicfest, one of Wales's leading music festivals. At the Salzburger Landestheater he conducted *La Gazzetta*, *The Trial*, *Wiener Blut* and *My Fair Lady*, and for the Buxton International Festival *La Tragédie de Carmen*, *Viva la Diva*, *The Land of Might-Have-Been* and *Cendrillon*. With English Touring Opera, he conducted *La Bohème* and *The Golden Cockerel*, and for Music Theatre Wales, Conor Mitchell's *Bwystfilod Aflan/Unclean Beasts*. A champion

of Welsh music, he has commissioned and performed new works from numerous composers, including Gareth Glyn's first opera, *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd*, and his opera film for Channel 4 and S4/C with Welsh National Opera orchestra, currently in post-production. Future plans include *Serch yw'r Doctor* (Arwel Hughes) with the Welsh National Opera orchestra and *The Echoes Return Slow* (Luke Lewis) for Music Theatre Wales.



Christopher Gillett

Director/Writer

Since making his debut in *The Gypsy Princess* at Sadler's Wells in 1981, Christopher has enjoyed an international singing career (including three appearances at the Buxton Festival), notably at the Royal Opera, La Scala, Milan, Los Angeles Opera, La Monnaie, Glyndebourne, Theater an der Wien, Dutch National Opera, Teatro Real, Staatsoper Berlin, and ENO. In 2011 he published his first book about being a jobbing tenor, *Who's My Bottom?*, followed over the next eight years by

Scraping The Bottom and *Bottom Feeder*. He also wrote for BBC Music Magazine, Opera, Opernwelt and Private Eye. He co-wrote *Knowing Britten* with Stuart Bedford, which won the 2021 Presto Music Book of the Year award. In 2016 he directed Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the University of Illinois, and in 2023 he directed his own version of *Der Schauspieldirektor* for Opera Zuid in the Netherlands, starring Sir Thomas Allen.



Joyce Henderson

Associate Director & Lisa

Joyce trained with Jacques Lecoq in Paris and is an Associate of Complicité, performing in *The Magic Flute* (DNO & ENO) and *The Street of Crocodiles*. As Movement Director productions include: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (NT), *Bleak Expectations* (Criterion); *Noises Off* (West End), *Amédée* (Birmingham Rep), and with Deborah Warner on *Fidelio*

(Glyndebourne), *Dido and Aeneas* (Viennas Festival), *Between Worlds & Julius Caesar* (Barbican). In 2024, Joyce directed *The Frogs* with Spymonkey. As an actor, theatre includes: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Holland Park), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare's Globe), *Medea* (West End & Broadway), *The Cherry Orchard* (Birmingham Rep). Film: 'Benediction', 'The Queen', 'Burke and Hare', 'About a Boy'.



Bretta Gerecke

Set & Lighting Designer

Bretta Gerecke is a Set, Costume, Lighting and Projection Designer for theatre, circus, opera, film and installation art. Recent designs include: *Pinocchio* (Stratford East); *The King's Speech* (The Watermill); *The Diviners* (Stratford Festival); *The Syndicate* (UK Tour); *Le Villi & Silenzio*, *Der Schauspieldirektor*, *Lady in the Dark* (Opera Zuid); *Branwen*: Dadeni (Wales

Millenium Centre); *Richard II* (Stratford Festival); *Stabat Mater* (Edmonton Opera); *The Invisible*, *Nevermore*, *Grand Acts of Theatre* (Catalyst Theatre); *Frankenstein* (Arizona Opera); *Grow* (Grand Theatre); *American (Tele)visions* (New York Theatre Workshop); *Threads I Woven*, *As You Like It* (RSC), *Coming to England*, *Tartuffe*, *East is East* (Birmingham Rep).



Adam McDonagh

Repetiteur

Irish pianist Adam McDonagh trained at the National Opera Studio, London. As part of the Irish National Opera Studio, supported by their inaugural Répétiteur Scholarship, he was assistant répétiteur for *Faust*, *La bohème*, *Salome* and *La traviata*, and he accompanied the Studio's masterclasses with Dame Ann Murray, Peter Whelan and Elina Garanča. Previous répétiteur experience includes productions of Handel's *Susanna*

(DIT Conservatory), *Le nozze di Figaro* (Glasthule Opera), *L'elisir d'amore* (Lismore Opera Festival), *Suor Angelica* (Empyrean Ensemble) and *Owen Wingrave* (Opera Collective Ireland). Adam is a Samling Artist and graduated from TU Dublin Conservatoire and Cambridge University. He participated on the Solti-Peretti Répétiteur Course (Georg Solti Accademia), and he will conduct the RTÉ Concert Orchestra for a RTÉ LyricFM recording.



Richard McCabe

Leo

Richard, an accomplished actor of both stage and screen, won a Tony award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Featured Role in a Play and won an Olivier Award for his role as Harold Wilson in *The Audience*. He was also nominated for an Olivier Award for his supporting role as Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*. Further stage credits include: *Yeoman of the Guard* (London Coliseum), *A Little*

Hotel on the Side (Theatre Royal Bath) and *A Tender Thing* (RSC). Alongside his many roles on stage, Richard is a prolific screen actor and can most recently be seen as Quaeator in *Gladiator II* directed by Ridley Scott. Further screen credits include: *Savage House* (Paramount), *Anatomy of a Scandal* (Netflix), *A Very British Scandal* (Amazon) and *The Pentaverate* (Netflix).

Owain Rowlands

John/Pete (Baritone)

Welsh baritone Owain Rowlands' highlights include playing the title role in the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama's productions of *Don Giovanni*, performing at WNO's annual Opera Gala, representing Wales at Expo 2025 in Japan as the Cultural International Ambassador for the Urdd and RWCMD and being Welsh National Opera Associate Artist for 2025/2026. Internationally, Owain has performed in China, Alabama, Georgia, New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia and

more recently in Japan. He is soon to graduate from the David Seligman Opera School at RWCMD where he was the recipient of the Sir Geraint Evans Centenary and the Ryan Davies Scholarships. Operatic roles include Bottom *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (RWCMD), Simone *Gianni Schicchi* (RWCMD), Il Re *La Bella Dormiente nel Bosco* (RWCMD) Notary/Guccio/Pinellino *Gianni Schicchi* (covers for WNO) and Brikbrak *Alcina's Island* (Bampton Classical Opera).



Jessica Hopkins

Evie/Beth (Soprano)

Jessica studied music at Clare College, University of Cambridge, and completed her postgraduate training at the RNCM. Recent highlights include First Niece *Peter Grimes* (Cadogan Hall) and joining the chorus in *The Magic Flute* (Opera North). Later this summer, Jessica will appear at the St Endellion Festival

in Cornwall, singing Nanetta *Falstaff* and Belinda *Dido and Aeneas*. A former BIF Young Artist and a 2025 James Bowman Young Artist for Vache Baroque, Jessica will join the Opéra national du Rhin for the 2025/26 season as a member of their opera studio.



Dan D'Souza

Buff (Baritone)

Anglo-Irish baritone Dan D'Souza made his debut at English National Opera as Belcore *The Elixir of Love* (Autumn 2024) and is now a Harewood Artist. During the 2025/2026 season, he will sing Sid *Albert Herring*. Previous engagements include Cirillo *Fedora* and Ibn-Hakia *Iolanta* (If Opera), Trinculo *La Tempesta* (Wexford Festival Opera), Apollo *Apollo e Dafne* (London Handel Festival), Angelotti *Tosca* (The Grange

Festival) and Flemish Deputy *Don Carlo* (Royal Ballet and Opera). Winner of both the Dame Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition and the Royal College of Music Lieder Competition, Dan D'Souza was a laureate for the 2023 Académie Orsay-Royaumont and a prize winner at the 2025 Tenor Viñas Competition.

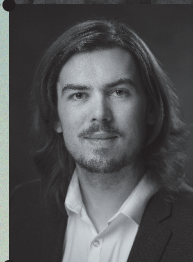


Conor Prendiville

Monsieur Vogelsang (Tenor)

Conor Prendiville is one of Ireland's finest young tenors. Recent highlights include Sciortino *La Ciociara* (Wexford Festival Opera), as well being a member of the Upper Austrian Opera Studio in the Landestheater Linz where he performed Riamund *Melusina*, Moser *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* and more.

Other highlights include Tamino *Die Zauberflöte* (Stadttheater Bad Hall), Beppe *Pagliacci* (Cork Opera House), Eisenstein *Die Fledermaus* (Merry Opera) and Flute *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Blackwater Valley Opera Festival).



Nazan Fikret

Madam Herz (Soprano)

Nazan Fikret, a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music Drama, is a former Britten Pears Young Artist and International Opera Awards bursary recipient. Appearances include First Lady *The Magic Flute* (Welsh National Opera); Queen of the Night *Die Zauberflöte* (Glyndebourne, Opera på Skäret, Garsington Opera, Nevill Holt Festival); Queen of the Night in *AbacadOpera!* (English National Opera/SkyTV); Anne Trulove

The Rake's Progress, Blonde *The Seraglio*, Teofane *Ottone*, Clorinda *Cinderella* (English Touring Opera); Arasse *Siroe, re di Persia* (Nederlandse Reisopera); Fiordiligi *Così fan tutte* (RLPO/European Opera Centre); soprano soloist in 8bit Digital Series, Girl/Bear in *How the Whale Became* (Royal Ballet & Opera); Diane Disney *The Perfect American* (Teatro Real, English National Opera).



© Bill Knight

Jane Burnell

Mademoiselle Silberklang (Soprano)

British/Irish Soprano Jane Burnell holds a Masters from the Royal Northern College of Music. She was a 2023 Buxton Young Artist and went on to make her professional debut at Buxton International Festival in 2024 as Gasparina *La Canterina* and Giovanna *Ermani*. Jane made her international debut in the same

year at Wexford Festival Opera as Molly Allgood *Lady Gregory in America*, where she returns this Autumn as a member of the Wexford Factory. Jane is a regular concert soloist across the UK, particularly for Baroque and Classical repertoire.



© Olivia Da Costa

Jamie MacDougall

Rob/Dan (Tenor)

Jamie MacDougall, currently on the teaching staff at the Laidlaw Centre at St Andrews University, has worked at Scottish Opera, Opera Holland Park, English National Opera and Opera North as well as companies in Europe and Canada. He collaborates closely with New Opera in Scotland Events (NOISE). On the concert platform he has worked with some of the world's top

baroque, chamber and symphony orchestras. In 2017 he was Artist in Residence at the St Andrews Voices Festival and in 2022 launched the New Scottish Song Book (published by the Voices Festival). His extensive discography covers baroque and classical, German, Scottish and English song as well as 20th century music.

