

Despite Covid, 2020 has been a successful year for Grange Park Opera...

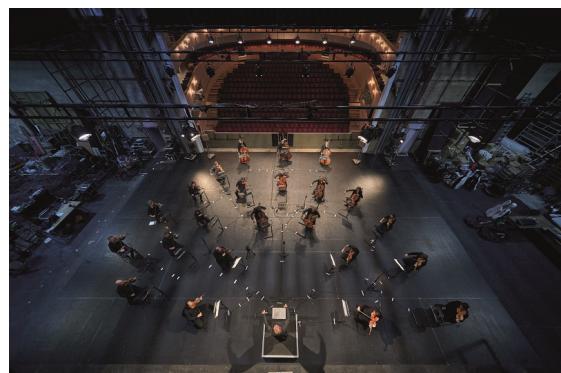
... and now they're looking forward to 2021

With live theatre performances in summer 2020 severely restricted by Covid-19, Grange Park Opera – and its indomitable CEO Wasfi Kani – were never going to let that stand in their way: “*Covid-19 has actually given us a unique opportunity to share the magic of great musical experiences - which are original, stimulating and food for the soul - with as many people as possible around the world. We are immensely proud to have done more than any other UK opera company during the pandemic., leading the arts pack out of lockdown and staying ahead.*”

- The company engaged 157 artists for their *Found* and *Interim* seasons in 50 new online, free to view events with 22 hours of entirely new material.
- 13 hours have so far been broadcast and there have been more than 50k views.
- These events include FOUR staged operas - all lesser known pieces - and concerts both indoors and outdoors.
- Payments were made to 146 Artists-in-Need (this includes backstage staff).



The *Found* Season (4 June – 12 July) was created when the summer programme at the ‘Theatre in the Woods’ had to be cancelled. 15 performances were released over 6 weeks featuring over 70 of the world’s leading singers and musicians – whose diaries would normally be frantic during that time. Superstars Sir Bryn Terfel and Sir Simon Keenlyside gave concerts from their homes in Wales, Tamara Rojo CBE presented a pas de deux from the English National Ballet, and the grand finale, Richard Strauss’ *Metamorphosen*, was performed by a classical supergroup united for the first British orchestral performance for three months.



Brand-new opera - *A Feast in the Time of Plague* - was performed by Grange Park Opera, live on stage, on Sunday 13 September 2020 in front of an invited audience of 250 people. With a libretto by opera-giant Sir David Pountney and music by Alex Woolf, *A Feast in the Time of Plague* was the only new opera to have been commissioned during lockdown and the first opera in the UK to be performed inside a theatre, and with an audience, since lockdown. It was filmed, and is now streamed free for everyone around the world.

Underway now is the *Interim Season* which celebrates the Autumn, Winter and Spring between two Summers of the opera season. 19 fresh performances featuring more than 60 artists are being released online, totally free to watch. A highlight is *Owen Wingrave*, a rarely performed opera created by Benjamin Britten specifically



for TV in 1971, which has been filmed on location in haunted houses around the UK. The Season will end with an Advent Calendar to Christmas Day.

And now Grange Park Opera is looking forward to Summer 2021....

Falstaff - Verdi

10 June – 18 July

As the saying goes, “*Shakespeare invented him, Verdi made him immortal*” – and, surely, it was Bryn Terfel who defined him. Terfel first sang Falstaff in 1999, and in 2021 the bass-baritone superstar returns once more to the role at Grange Park Opera. This production by Stephen Medcalf was first shown in the 17th century Farnese theatre in Parma (2011) with designs that are truly Falstaffian including sensational backcloths by Italian master Rinaldo Rinaldi.



Natalya Romaniw, Janis Kelly and Sara Fulgoni are the conniving wives of Windsor in Verdi’s only comic opera, written when the composer was 80 – contradicting the adage that you can’t teach an old dog new tricks. The opera is a hymn to the irrepressibility of the human spirit.

As Terfel says, “*It’s just a joy to portray on the stage, this loveable old rogue who can’t help but lie, eat, cheat and drink*”.

Ivan the Terrible - Rimsky Korsakov

19 June – 14 July

David Pountney directs a new production of one of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s hidden gems: the composer’s first opera, *Ivan the Terrible* – also known as *The Maid of Pskov*.

The tyrannical Tsar, Ivan IV, sweeps through the city of Novgorod, on a wholesale pillage. In the picturesque town of Pskov, Ivan billets himself at the house where he sees a beautiful young woman. Something stays his hand and the city is spared. Could it be because he has discovered his long-lost love child, Olga?



With its expansive music, dramatic plot and vivid crowd scenes, *Ivan the Terrible* is a spectacle.

The exciting cast includes Evelina Dobracheva as Princess Olga, Liubov Sokolova as Vlasyevna, Carl Tanner as Tucha, and Clive Bayley as Ivan the Terrible.

World première

The Life & Death of Alexander Litvinenko

15 & 17 July

Composer - Anthony Bolton

Libretto - Kit Hesketh-Harvey

Exiled and living in London, former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko learns that his former colleagues are using his face for target practice. Litvinenko had publicly accused his FSB



superiors of extensive corruption and refused orders to assassinate, Boris Berezovsky.

A law is passed that allows Russian traitors to be killed anywhere in the world; a few months later – in November 2006 - Litvinenko is poisoned with radioactive polonium-210 and dies.

This real-life story is told through a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards covering events in Russia that lead Litvinenko to seek exile and his family's life in Muswell Hill. Extensive use is made of historic film footage.

The cast includes Andrew Watts (Head of the FSB), Andrew Slater (Boris Berezovsky), Adrian Dwyer (Alexander Litvinenko) and Rebecca Bottone (Marina Litvinenko).

Using a full chorus and a 52-piece orchestra, Bolton's musical language is contemporary, yet incorporates the lyrical tradition of the Russian masters. He quotes from both opera and normal life: an army marching song, a Moscow football team anthem and the Chechen national anthem.

The opera is sung in English, with some choruses in Russian.

La Bohème - Puccini

12 June – 8 July

Regularly voted as the world's favourite opera - Puccini's evocation of life, love and death in Bohemian Paris at the turn of the century has had audiences weeping into their handkerchiefs ever since its première in 1896.

When penniless poet Rodolfo meets seamstress Mimì they fall passionately in love. But their happiness is threatened when Rodolfo learns that Mimì is gravely ill.

Luis Chapa plays Rodolfo with Irish soprano Ailish Tynan as Mimi. William Dazeley is painter Marcello and Hye-Youn Lee his quarrelsome, needy girlfriend, Musetta.



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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Grange Park Opera was founded in 1998 by Wasfi Kani, OBE. Since then, it has performed to over 300,000 people with more than 75 productions and 450 performances, during the course of 22 festivals. Productions take place at the Theatre in the Woods, a five-tiered, 700-seat opera house on the estate of the 14th century West Horsley Place, which was inherited by Bamber Gascoigne from his aunt, the Duchess of Roxburghe. The £11.5m cost of the building was raised by Kani herself from private donations in just one year.

Wasfi Kani OBE, CEO Grange Park Opera, was born in 1956 in Cable Street in London's East End, and is almost certainly the only opera impresario who spent her childhood in a house with an outside lavatory. A violinist, she played for the National Youth Orchestra and went on to study music at St Hilda's College, Oxford. After 10 years in the city, programming and designing financial computer systems, she started a small computer consultancy which gave her the flexibility to spend more time conducting. By 1993, she had made music her full-time career. In 1992, Wasfi was made Chief Executive of Garsington Opera in Oxford. In 1998, Kani founded her own opera company, Grange Park Opera, which in 2016 moved to West Horsley Place. Wasfi Kani is an Honorary Fellow of the RIBA and St Hilda's College, Oxford. She received an OBE in the New Year's Honours List 2002 for her work in bringing her second opera company, Pimlico Opera, into prisons.

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Wasfi Kani, OBE © Richard Lewisohn

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