



The Virtual Opera Project

Press Release

My name is Rachael, I am a self-employed, freelance opera stage director. Like many of my colleagues, I have spent the last few months of lockdown in a state of great unease. I miss my friends, my colleagues, my work and my passion. I am terrified of the uncertainty of the current and future financial situation. I share these feelings with many people in the Arts industry.

There are countless singers and orchestral players who have become unemployed and haven't made music for months, with no one to perform to and venues laying dormant. Conductors and creative teams are faced with the gloomy prospect that there will be nothing to go back to... and mentally it's taking its toll on us all. I only ever truly feel myself when I am in the rehearsal room. For that to have gone, and so suddenly, has left me bereft and anxious. As a result, all I can think of is what to do about this, and how can I make a difference for my colleagues and beyond?

That's why I have started VOPERA – The Virtual Opera Project. I want to make something that people can be actively and creatively involved in. We are all worried about finances, but fundamentally the emotional impact of not working and not making music is being underestimated. I can do something about that. This project would involve dozens of artists - working individually and together. Singers need to sing, players need to play, and I can make that possible.

My idea is a new online production of Ravel's opera *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*. The scenes are linked by a Child (who is being homeschooled) having a nightmare/daydream/fantasy about things in his house coming to life. The characters that the Child meets are us - artists that are trapped in their homes reacting to this current environment. Some of us are struggling, some of us are thriving, some are scared, some are hyper, some can't get out of bed. It is a direct response from us, as well as a reflection of what is happening. Each scene is filmed in isolation by the singer, and then, using technology, we give them a character, a costume, a background. We have been trialling this for the last few weeks and have achieved a huge amount in that time. As for the orchestra, we would have players record themselves as soloists, and collect all of the recordings and footage to make a film.

I am going to announce the project on Wednesday 1 July, as well as sending out a Participation Invitation so that anyone who wants to take part can apply. I will collect those names and then organise rehearsals, filming and recording. I am two months into a Funding Plan, as I need to secure a budget in order for this to happen. I'm doing all of this on my own, with some help from my partner Mark-Anthony Turnage. The Musical Director is Lee Reynolds.

There will be a qualified mental health practitioner on hand throughout the production process, so that if anyone needs support, it is there for them. I realise that "returning to performing" is going to present its own challenges and I am prepared for that.

I would be very happy to answer any questions that you have and really hope to hear from you soon.

With many thanks,
RACHAEL HEWER
Vopera20@gmail.com
www.rachaelhewer.com