



PRESS RELEASE

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SCOTTISH OPERA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS TOUR SETS SAIL WITH *THE DRAGON OF THE WESTERN SEA*

Thousands of primary school pupils will rehearse and perform an opera about the exciting voyages of 14th century Chinese commander, Admiral Zheng He. Entitled *The Dragon of the Western Sea*, it has been composed by **Alan Penman** with lyrics by **Ross Stenhouse**. Pupils learn the words and songs in their own classrooms and then work with a Scottish Opera team to prepare for a performance in front of classmates, friends and family.

Scottish Opera's Primary Schools Tour hits the road on 15 January in Cambuslang and tours all over Scotland until November, giving pupils from primaries five, six and seven the chance to take part in this interactive musical experience. *The Dragon of the Western Sea* tells the story of Admiral Zheng He and his vast fleet of ships with 28,000 crew which set sail from China to Indonesia, India, Arabia and the grasslands of Africa in search of trade, treaties and treasure.

Scottish Opera's Director of Education and Outreach, **Jane Davidson** said: 'The composer and librettist were inspired by this real life story to create a dramatic tale of adventure on the high seas. The plot gives us a wonderful opportunity to introduce Scottish primary pupils to a different perspective on the age of discovery. Admiral He predated the journeys made by European explorers by many years. Using a blend of musical styles as well as key words and phrases from China, Africa and India, the opera provides a fascinating snapshot of the history and customs of other cultures in an appealing and accessible way.'

On 16 February, Chinese New Year, there will be a special performance of *The Dragon of the Western Sea* at Jordanhill Primary in Glasgow to mark the official launch of Scottish Opera's Confucius Classroom Hub status. Awarded at the end of last year by Hanban Council in Beijing, the headquarters of Confucius Institutes worldwide, Scottish Opera is the first opera company in the world to be selected for this accolade, and is one of four new hubs based outwith a school setting.

Scottish Opera will be opening its own 'classroom' at the Company's Edington Street production studios, where resources on Chinese performance, arts and culture will be kept. It will be used as a rehearsal space for Chinese-related programmes.

Confucius Classrooms are hubs usually based in schools and serving the local community. The concept promotes joint planning of cultural activities, sharing ideas and resources to stimulate the learning and teaching of Chinese language and culture.

In October of 2017, a team from the Education Department at Scottish Opera travelled to Beijing to perform a show called *Warriors! The Incredible Army*, working with 900 pupils from Fang Cao Di International School. The show had previously toured primary schools in Scotland.

Jane Davidson said that she is 'delighted and proud' that Scottish Opera has been named a Confucius Classroom Hub, adding: 'Scottish Opera, with its national remit, will use its new status to create opportunities for Scottish children and young people to explore the artistic culture of China through the medium of our European style of opera. Specialised art forms such as folk tales, puppetry, dance and visuals can provide rich sources for musical and dramatic fusion. So far, Chinese history has provided us with two wonderful opportunities to engage Scottish children in artistic and educational experiences that are strengthened through this unique cultural partnership.'

The Dragon of the Western Sea tour is supported by The Gannochy Trust, The Robertson Trust, The KMF Maxwell Stuart Charitable Trust, Scottish Opera's Education Angels and a number of other generous funders.

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www.scottishopera.org.uk

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Creative Team

Music	Alan Penman
Words	Ross Stenhouse

Performance Team

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Jamie Macdonald / Neil Fenwick

Jennifer Neil

Performance diary

The Spring tour of *The Dragon of the Western Sea* will visit to schools in South Lanarkshire, West Lothian, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Stirling, West Dunbartonshire, Perth, Aberdeen, Fife, Moray, Aberdeenshire, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Highlands, East Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway.

In the Summer, the tour will visit schools in North Ayrshire, Argyll and Bute, Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, Angus, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, East Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire, South Ayrshire, Moray, Midlothian, Perth and the Scottish Borders.

The Autumn tour will visit schools in East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Ayr, Fife, Angus, Edinburgh and South Ayrshire.

Notes to Editors

Scottish Opera biography:

Scottish Opera is Scotland's national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland. It was founded by Alexander Gibson in 1962 and was inaugurated with a production of *Madama Butterfly* at the King's Theatre in Glasgow.

Notable achievements include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Inés de Castro* at the 1996 Edinburgh International Festival; complete Ring cycles at the 2003 Edinburgh International Festival, which won the 2004 South Bank Show Award for Best Opera Production; and the Achievement in Opera Award at the 2017 UK Theatre Awards for Sir David McVicar's production of Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Recent commissions include *Five:15 Operas Made in Scotland* (2008-10); *The Lady from the Sea*, *Clemency*, the double bill of *In the Locked Room* and *Ghost Patrol* (winner of a South Bank Sky Arts Award) which premiered at the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival and 2016's *The Devil Inside* by Stuart MacRae and Louise Welsh.

Scottish Opera is committed to bringing the widest possible range of opera, performed to the highest possible standards, to the maximum audience throughout Scotland and the UK. Each year it performs in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness, as well as smaller theatres, village halls and community centres throughout the country.

Scottish Opera's Education and Outreach Department was the first of its kind of any opera company in Europe. It operates an extensive programme which involves over 8,000 primary school children every year as well as many other activities including adult learning and *Unwrapped* taster sessions.

Scottish Opera is supported by the Scottish Government.



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