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##### Press Release

9 March 2022

**SCOTTISH opera’s *memory spinners* project,for people living with dementia, returns to glasgow**

 **and st andrews**

*Memory Spinners*, Scottish Opera’s project designed to engage with people living with dementia through music and art, has begun at Glasgow’s St Columba’s Church and Holy Trinity Church Hall in St Andrews. Having launched in 2012, the sessions were put on hold for two years during the pandemic and this is the first time the groups have been able to come together since.

Scottish Opera believes, and indeed has shown, that engagement with music and the other art forms can help those living with dementia and their carers to stay positive, and take pleasure in some of the many aspects of engaging with the arts that bring happiness and fulfilment. This helps to alleviate feelings of anxiety and distress which this disease brings to so many people’s lives.

It’s a common misconception that all people living with dementia can no longer learn new skills such as simple choreography, learning song words or creating art work.

A key aim for the programme is to create a relaxing and welcoming environment, where people can develop informal support networks as they get to know one and another. Each week, rehearsals and visual arts activities build towards a short performance inspired by the music, characters and storyline of a popular piece from the operatic repertoire to which friends and families are invited.

A team of artists and volunteers (some from other departments within Scottish Opera) are on hand to ensure that everyone can participate on an equal footing, including those with the diagnosis, as well as those who they share their lives with – as it’s vitally important that the carer is also free to focus on their own personal creativity and enjoyment. Over the years, many carers and family members have expressed how precious the opportunity to share the communal experience of creating a performance has been in maintain their relationship with their family member or friend, especially as the disease progresses.

Memory Spinners is all about celebrating the talents and abilities – existing and new – of the participants through their interaction with the various art forms and, most importantly, with each other.

Those who have taken part in Memory Spinners previously praised the sessions for having a fun, inclusive and encouraging atmosphere, saying they were great for making new friends, learning new creative skills and reducing feelings of isolation. As well as being a positive experience for those living with dementia, carers felt the sessions gave them a much needed respite from caring. One carer described Memory Spinners as “one big happy family”, saying her aunt “changes into a much calmer and happier person” when attending the sessions.

**Jane Davidson**, Scottish Opera’s Director of Education and Outreach said: ‘We are thrilled to be able to re-start our Glasgow Memory Spinners programme after two years’ absence due to Covid 19 protocols. This was the first group with which we launched the project back in 2011, and as such, has always held a very special place in the hearts of the artists who lead the project. We’re so looking forward to seeing some old friends as well as making many new ones. Music and laughter has always been at the core of the Memory Spinners project, and we hope that our cast of wonderful participants will enjoy spending time in the company of operetta’s most delightful heroine, *The Merry Widow* – as she takes us on whirlwind trip through the glamourous, romantic and champagne sparking world of nineteenth century Vienna.’

The Memory Spinners programme is open to all with a diagnosis, no matter the stage, along with their family member or carer. New members are very welcome, and those interested in signing up can contact: Katie.Poulter@scottishopera.org.uk

The Glasgow sessions will run until 4 April at St Columba's Church, 74 Hopehill Rd, Glasgow G20 7HH.

The St Andrews sessions will run until 5 April, and a new block will also run from 19 April to 21 June at Holy Trinity Church Hall, Queens Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 9QF.

Memory Spinners is supported by RS Macdonald Charitable Trust, J McDonald Menzies Charitable Trust, Sylvia Aitken Charitable Trust and SO Education Angels.

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[www.scottishopera.org.uk](http://www.scottishopera.org.uk)

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Notes to Editors

All productions are created and performed in line with Scottish Government guidelines.

The Company’s Opera on Screen productions are available to watch at: www.scottishopera.org.uk/what-s-on/opera-on-screen/.

The collection includes Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore*, Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, *Opera Highlights*, Janáček’s *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*, Menotti’s *The Telephone* and Samuel Bordoli and Jenni Fagan’s *The Narcissistic Fish*.
Scottish Opera is Scotland’s national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland.

The Company's performance repertoire ranges across five centuries, from the earliest operas to newly-commissioned world premieres, working in collaboration with the world's finest singers and creatives, alongside The Orchestra of Scottish Opera and choruses. Recent accolades include a South Bank Sky Arts Award, a Scottish Award for New Music, Sunday Herald Culture Awards and a Herald Angel, as well as a 2020 RPS Award. In 2021 the Company returned to live audiences with Sir David McVicar’s new production of Verdi’s *Falstaff* performed in Glasgow and at Edinburgh International Festival.

The Company tours extensively across Scotland, from the largest-scale theatres to the smallest of rural venues, to ensure we are within reach of as many of our country's very dispersed population as possible. Our specially-adapted 40-foot long trailer brings ‘Pop-up Opera’ performances to thousands of people each year in a range of inspiring and unexpected community locations. In the summer of 2021 the Company performed nearly 200 shows of its Pop-up Opera Roadshow, to socially distanced audiences of 11,014 people. This is one of the most extensive touring programmes of any European opera company and a much-valued contribution to Scotland’s cultural and artistic life, particularly in remote and island communities.

The Company’s Education and Outreach programme, which celebrates 50 years in 2021, includes an annual Primary Schools Tour, bringing upper primary-aged children the opportunity to perform their own specially-commissioned piece, alongside three professional singers. Around 120 schools and 9,000 pupils take part each year.

Scottish Opera aims to be inclusive and affordable through availability of free and cheap tickets, as well as performances offering audio description, and specially-devised shorter access performances.

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