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**Press Release**

27 March 2023

**OLD GALA HOUSE IN GALASHIELS SET TO HOST exhibition of ART work from scottish opera’s community project**

***SWEET SOUNDS IN WILD PLACES***

From April 29 to June 17, at Old Gala House in Galashiels, Scottish Opera, in partnership with Live Borders, are staging a free exhibition of original work for the project *Sweet Sounds in Wild Places*.

First exhibited at Theatre Royal Glasgow at the end of last year, the visuals, recordings and 3D clay models going on display were created by a group of women from the Scottish Borders to help build creative skills as well as increasing self-confidence and self-expression through engagement with the arts. The project formed part of the 250th anniversary celebrations of the birth of Sir Walter Scott.

Scott’s 1819 novel *The Bride of Lammermoor,* which tells the tragic love story of Lucy Ashton and Edgar, Master of Ravenswood, served as the starting point for *Sweet Sounds in Wild Places.* When Lucy is isolated by domineering relatives and pressured in to marrying the heir of a neighbouring noble house, Lucy’s mental health breaks down, leading to fatal consequences on the wedding night. Gaetano Donizetti’s 1835 opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, was inspired by Scott’s work.

In 2021, the participants attended a series of free workshops in two locations: Hawick and Galashiels, (with support from The Abbotsford Trust and Live Borders) exploring music, creative writing, film and photography. The sessions were led by a team of Scottish Opera artists (including a composer, a performance poet/writer and two visual artists) before both groups came together over one weekend at Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott.

Exploring the characters of Lucy/Lucia, *Sweet Sounds in Wild Places* is displayed in four acts, a format that mirrors a common structure for many operas and plays and which sketches the arc of the story; each with a distinctive artistic focus

The exhibition explores the issues of loneliness and lack of empowerment, as well as the impact, for good and bad, that landscape and environment can have on mental health. The project aimed to provide a safe space for people to rebuild their confidence and emotional resilience; to reflect on their own experiences during lockdown; to demonstrate how opera can be used as a tool to raise awareness of issues around women’s wellbeing and to find innovative ways to address health inequalities amongst the Scottish population.

The *Sweet Sounds in Wild Places* project was developed following the publication of a report in September 2020, by the international aid organisation CARE, which revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic caused a women’s mental health crisis. Reasons for this included reduced income, home schooling, care of elderly relatives, and social isolation. In certain situations mirroring Lucy/Lucia’s, some respondents cited aggressive, controlling, and violent behaviour from partners and family, with nowhere to escape during lockdowns.

**Jane Davidson**, Scottish Opera’s Director of Outreach and Education said: ‘The pandemic was life changing for most of us, and many people sought to re-evaluate their priorities and values during this time. This was a project that sought to provide opportunities for women in the Scottish Borders to develop their creative capacities in music, visual arts and poetry, whilst exploring themes that could be connected to their experiences during lockdown including feelings of loneliness, isolation, lack of empowerment which are similarly faced by the central character Lucy/Lucia, the heroine of Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* which, in turn, inspired Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor.* Drawing parallels between the challenges faced by this fictional woman and some real life situations, gave the community artists the chance to reflect upon their own experiences through the lens of creative expression, helping to build emotional resilience.’

Live Borders Assistant Curator, **Phoebe Stewart**, said: ‘We are delighted to be exhibiting work generated by this project with Scottish Opera and created by women of the Scottish Borders. The pandemic was a challenging time and this was a fantastic opportunity to harness the experience and channel it into creativity; it demonstrates resilience and has generated some wonderful pieces of work we are pleased to now be showing at Old Gala House.’

**Viola Madau**, one of the workshop leaders said: ‘The participant’s creative journey with us started with a shaky black line on a white piece of paper, and culminated with powerful and meaningful artwork they were proud of. Witnessing their creativity blossoming was the most incredible thing. Growing up we are told, directly or indirectly, that the arts are either something to be remunerative or to abandon for skills that are more practical. The brilliant women we worked with went through tough times in their lives and these experiences and feelings naturally emerged in their art pieces. This was wonderful to see; proving that art can be an incredible part of one's healing process.’

**Susan Ballard**, one of the project participants said: ‘*Sweet Sounds in Wild Places* was incredibly enriching for me. I had been feeling hopeless and directionless since the pandemic, but thanks to an inspiring team from Scottish Opera, I found new, creative and fun ways to explore and express difficult experiences in a supportive group. I think about what I learnt a lot and continue to feel grateful for the skills and perspectives the tutors helped me to develop. A truly transformative project. ‘

*Sweet Sounds in Wild Places* is supported by **The Cruden Foundation** and **Scottish Opera’s Education Angels**. Special thanks to ATG Theatres; Live Borders and Dr Sandra MacKenzie, Head of Education at Abbotsford, Melrose.

More information about the exhibition can be found at [www.liveborders.org.uk/exhibitions/exhibition-sweet-sounds-in-wild-places-an-exhibition-in-four-acts-old-gala-house/](http://www.liveborders.org.uk/exhibitions/exhibition-sweet-sounds-in-wild-places-an-exhibition-in-four-acts-old-gala-house/)

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

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# *Sweet Sounds in Wild Places*: Credits

**Scottish Opera Education & Outreach Artists**

**Jenny Lindsay** Poet / Writer

**Karen MacIver** Composer

**Viola Madau**  Photographer / Graphic Designer

**Iain Piercy**  Visual Artist

**Community Artists Group**

Susan Ballard Anila Clugwai

Fiona Colton Saadia Kamran

Pam Rigby Paula Starkey

Maggie Tod Wendy Tovell

Charlotte Turner

**Recording Artists**

**Marion Christie**  Flute and Bodhrán

**Jenny Lindsay**  Reader

**Karen MacIver**  Piano

**Robin Mason**  Cello

**Shuna Scott Sendall**  Soprano

**Ross Stenhouse** Reader

**Notes to Editors**

**Scottish Opera**

Scottish Opera is Scotland’s national opera company and the largest performing arts organisation in Scotland. The Company was founded in 1962 by Sir Alexander Gibson with the goal ‘to lay the treasures of opera at the feet of the people of Scotland’, opening with performances of *Madama Butterfly* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The 2022/23 season marks its 60th Anniversary.

Scottish Opera’s performance repertoire ranges across five centuries, from the earliest operas to newly-commissioned world premieres, balancing favourites with under-explored works. The Company collaborates with the world’s finest singers and creatives, together with The Orchestra of Scottish Opera and choruses for each opera. Recent accolades include a South Bank Sky Arts Award, a Scottish Award for New Music, Sunday Herald Culture Awards, a 2017 UK Theatre Award, and a 2020 RPS Award. The Company took operas to Brooklyn in 2017 and Adelaide in 2020, and the 2022/23 season sees productions first staged at Scottish Opera appearing in Santa Fe, Madrid, Toulouse, and Los Angeles. The 60th Anniversary Season includes the UK fully-staged premiere of Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar* and the Company premiere of Puccini’s *Il trittico*.

The Company tours extensively across Scotland to ensure performances are within reach of as many of the country’s dispersed population as possible – this year, 60 locations across the length and breadth of the country. Specially adapted 40-foot long trailers bring Pop-up Opera performances to thousands of people each year. 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 & Outreach programme, the oldest in Europe, includes an annual in-person and digital Primary Schools Tour, bringing children the opportunity to perform their own specially commissioned piece alongside 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.

Scottish Opera is committed to making opera for all, presenting opera at the highest possible standards in theatres across the country, outdoors on tour, and digital audiences around the world. The Company’s 2021 production of *The Gondoliers*, filmed live at Festival Theatre Edinburgh, is available on BBC iPlayer. Scottish Opera’s On Screen productions are available to watch at [www.scottishopera.org.uk/what-s-on/opera-on-screen](http://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*, Menotti’s *The Telephone*, and Samuel Bordoli and Jenni Fagan’s *The Narcissistic Fish*. A new commission will be announced in 2023.

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