The Perfect Opera

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## About Virtually Opera

Virtually Opera has a simple mission:

"To create opera that is innovative, open to all, and broadens the boundaries of the form."

We make shows that we hope anyone can enjoy, and take questions like 'would someone who's never seen an opera get as much (or more) out of this as someone who's been a connoisseur for years?' very seriously. We don't assume that music is a universal language, but one that exists in particular cultures. So to ask 'who is this open to?' is to ask 'who already speaks this language of music/film/staging?'

We combine opera with different genres of film, or with mediums like sketch comedy and table-top roleplaying. Key to this is a principle that it's not 'an opera that appropriates another form', but an example of that form that *needs* to be an opera to be fully-realised artistically.

We don't believe that opera's inherently a superior artform. It's a great form, but one that needs to rethink its legacy to enter the modern world.

## The Perfect Opera Synopsis

The show opens with three singers and their conductor asking the audience what should go into a ‘perfect’ opera. Audience research shows that it needs a classic story, and to be completely original, so Macbeth enters, riding a camel. It needs a love story, and they are deeply in love. And it needs a female character who is strong/empowered/evil/mad/magic, so Lady Macbeth finds out and pursues absurd vengeance. As they scramble through the list, via pointless ballet scenes, three-handed chorus numbers, and multicultural orientalism, the singers come to the end and the obligatory moral: if you want to reach a lot of people with your social message, why bother writing an opera?

## Photographs

[Images for The Perfect Opera can be found by clicking this link.](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6w8enx89fp2asa7/AAD3SsehH86YJGxXZTwK31sta?dl=0)

## Previous reviews and audience feedback

BBC Music Magazine Choice, July 2019.

“Fresh… unlocked the mysteries” - The Guardian

“Punchy, entertaining staging” - Opera Magazine

“Its fond mockery reflects [a] love for the form, and I hope it can be shared with both opera lovers and those new to the form. I am sure that both will enjoy it greatly.” - Bill Bankes-Jones, Artistic Director, Tête à Tête

“I am sure it will divert and excite audiences everywhere it is heard, and prove a good new addition to the music-theatre genre.” - Professor Julian Anderson, composer

“An exuberant libretto that is packed full of detail, raucous humour, and physical theatre.” - Dr. Rebecca Caine, librettist

“That would be a perfect Fringe hour” - Tom Rees-Williams, script editor

## Social media

Website: [leodoulton.com/virtually-opera](http://www.leodoulton.com/virtually-opera)

Facebook: [@VirtuallyOpera](https://www.facebook.com/VirtuallyOpera/)

Twitter: [@VirtuallyOpera](https://twitter.com/VirtuallyOpera)

## Contact details

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## Cast and creative team

**Music:** Peter Davis

**Words/Director:** Leo Doulton

**Music Director:** Erika Gundesen

**Soprano/The Camel:** Rosalie Warner

**Alto/The Conductor:** Erika Gundesen

**Tenor/Macbeth:** Robin Horgan

**Bass/Lady Macbeth:** Samuel Dewese

**Piano (London):** Michelle Santiago

**Piano (Edinburgh:** Beth Jerem

**Clarinet/Saxophone:** Louis Stanhope

## Cast Biographies

**Composer** - Peter Davis

Peter Davis is a graduate from The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, with a master's in Composition. His music covers a wide vocabulary of style, and often tries to focus on the 'luminosity' of the sound, with colourful harmonies and timbres. He has in the past written for Scottish Opera, the EXAUDI Vocal ensemble, Plus/Minus Ensemble, as well as a large number of emerging professionals from Guildhall, including the violist, Katherine Clarke. His music has also been workshopped by the Edinburgh Quartet, the Maggini Quartet, and players of the London Symphony orchestra, and at Guildhall has studied with James Weeks and Julian Anderson.

Peter is also a proficient cellist, often performing with Street orchestras across England, Scotland, and the Netherlands, and has also performed in prestigious venues such as the Wigmore Hall in London.

**Words/Director** - Leo Doulton

Leo Doulton is a director and writer, working in the U.K., Germany, Canada, and the USA.

His opera directing includes *The Fairy Queen* for King’s Opera, *The Tsar Wants His Photograph Taken* for University College London, and the world premiere of Peter Davis’ *The Perfect Opera*. He is Artistic Director of Virtually Opera, experimenting with fusion opera since 2016.

He also directed *A Speaks* at the Camden People’s Theatre, cabarets written by inmates of the Theresienstadt concentration camp in *Theatre in the Theresienstadt Ghetto* at the Bloomsbury Theatre, and *At the Break of Dawn*, which was nominated for the Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award.

As a librettist, works of particular note include *The Perfect Opera*, for which he won the Sound and Music Francis Chagrin Award, *Still Magic, Still Tragic*, a site-specific work for the London Transport Museum, and various texts for *Voiceworks* at the Wigmore Hall.

His other writing includes *Man and God*, *A War Game*, and *A Speaks*, which was part of the 2017 Hotbed Festival at Camden People’s Theatre. Translations include *Don Giovanni* and the English-language premiere of Olafsson’s *Baldusbra*.

Upcoming highlights include the world premiere of *The Perfect Opera* at the Edinburgh Fringe and *Don Jo!* at the Grimeborn Festival at the Arcola Theatre.

**Music Director/The Conductor** - Erika Gundesen

Erika Gundesen is a distinguished graduate of the University of British Columbia in Canada as well as the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, where she was awarded a Masters in Piano Performance as well as an Artist Diploma as a répétiteur. She has competed as a finalist in the Canadian Music Competition as well as the Knigge International Piano Competition. She has also been an assistant conductor at the Guildhall School, a Young Artist at the National Opera Studio, and an Emerging Artist for Scottish Opera. Erika has worked as a freelance pianist, coach and conductor in Canada and the UK, including recitals, opera, cabaret and theatre productions. Recent credits include The Magic Flute, Káťa Kabanová, Anthropocene, Rigoletto (Scottish Opera), Sweeney Todd, My Fair Lady (Geoids Musical Theatre), Whistle Down the Wind, Parade, Oliver!, West Side Story, Sweeney Todd (Vivo d’Arte), Così fan tutte (Opera Loki), Pirates of Penzance (St. Monica’s Players), The Tale of Januarie, Ariane, The Rape of Lucretia (Guildhall School), Parade (London Theatre Workshop), and Songs for a New World (Jazzhands Optional).

**The Camel:** Rosalie Warner

Young British mezzo-soprano Rosalie Warner is an imaginative and versatile performer currently based in London. Born in Oxford, she studied English Literature at the University of Manchester, where she became heavily involved in the alt-folk and experimental scenes. In 2016 she moved to London to embark on an Artist Masters at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, under the tutelage of Susan Waters. She graduated with distinction last year, and was awarded a Concert Recital Diploma for her final recital, in which she performed works by Handel, Lili Boulanger, and Argento. She has performed at Leeds Lieder festival, 20|21 Concerts, St Marylebone festival, The Place, Milton Court, and Wigmore Hall. She recently completed her second tour with Merry Opera Company’s staged production of Handel’s Messiah, and in July she will join Orchestra for the Earth for their Alpine tour, where they’ll be performing together works by Alma Mahler, Schoenberg, and Gustav Mahler in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Northern Italy.

**Macbeth:** Robin Horgan

Robin is currently a member of the Alexander Gibson Opera School at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Previously, Robin read French and German at the University of Oxford before taking a Masters in Vocal Performance at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was runner-up in the aria prize.

Operatic roles include Podesta La finta giardiniera (Ryedale Festival Opera), Benvolio Roméo et Juliette (Grange Park Opera), Le fils Les Mamelles de Tiresias (RCS), Sailor Dido and Aeneas (RCS), Trio Tenor Trouble in Tahiti (RCS), Howard Boucher Dead Man Walking (RCS), Don Basilio/Don Curzio Le nozze di Figaro (RCS), and cover Tom Rakewell The Rake’s Progress (British Youth Opera).

Recent concert highlights include Puccini Messa di Gloria for Southampton Choral Society, Rossini Petite Messe Solennelle for Rosenethe Singers, Handel Messiah at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, Mozart Requiem and Haydn Creation for Oxford Orpheus, a recital of bel canto songs at the Barbican Concert Hall, Schumann Spanische Liebeslieder and Brahms Neue Liebeslieder Waelzer at the Wigmore Hall.

**Lady Macbeth:** Samuel Dewese

American baritone Samuel James Dewese is making a name for himself as an evocative artist in the UK and beyond. A graduate of the Royal College of Music, London, Samuel studied under Graeme Broadbent. In competition Samuel has twice been named a district winner by the Metropolitan Opera, captured second prize in the James Toland International Competition, was a grand finalist in the Hariclea Darclée International Competition, and was invited to the 55th Viñas International Contest in Barcelona. In 2017, Samuel gave the European premiere of Eric Malmquist's Chicago Songs before singing the title role of Eugene Onegin/Tchaikovsky at the RCM in 2018. He then created the title role in the world premiere opera John Henry/McCarthy with Tête à Tête, and joined Opera Della Luna in The Arcadians at Wilton’s Music Hall. In 2019, Samuel sings the premiere of The Perfect Opera/Davis at the Edinburgh Festival before joining Florentine Opera as a Baumgartner Studio Artist for 2019-2020.

Piano (Edinburgh): Beth Jerem

Clarinet/Saxophone: Louis Stanhope

Louis Stanhope is a British saxophonist currently enrolled on the Master of Music course at the Royal College of Music, where he is the Fiona &amp; Douglas Flint Award Holder. He is in his first year at the RCM under the tutelage of Kyle Horch, and previously completed an undergraduate degree at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, studying with Naomi Sullivan, where he won the 2018 RBC Saxophone Prize.

Louis is a keen chamber musician having founded a number of ensembles including the Avesta Saxophone Quartet – winners of the 2017 Leamington Music Prize – and Trio Lophea – who recorded their debut album Sounds of Belgium in 2018. Louis also enjoys performing new music and working directly with composers to create new works. He has had the pleasure of working with composers such as Clare Loveday, Michael Wolters, and Graham Fitkin, and has premiered works by Howard Skempton, Paul Evernden, and Rob Roberts.

## Press Release

A sketch comedy opera for this year’s Edinburgh Fringe

*Virtually Opera present:*

THE PERFECT OPERA

Love! Death! Macbeth! And a pantomime camel!

Fusion opera company **Virtually Opera** make their Fringe debut with a Shakespearean adaptation like no other. **The Perfect Opera** explores what opera should be in the modern world. Rejecting the seriousness of the post-World War Two operatic tradition, it’s a new kind of show that combines the best of opera and comedy, for fans of both forms.

A **sketch comedy opera**, cramming in everything people want in the ‘perfect’ opera.A group of singers want to put on an opera - not merely a good opera, but the *perfect* opera. So they’ve made a list of what people want.

It must be based on a classic tale, so **Macbeth** enters. It must be purely original, so he’s riding a **pantomime camel.** It needs a love story, and Macbeth and his camel are *deeply* in love. Then Lady Macbeth finds out, and a hiphop foxtrot operatic sketch comedy ensues.

Doulton and Davis were bored of new comic operas that were ‘**funny - for opera**’, Most draw on opera’s isolated comic tradition, based on outdated medieval commedia dell’arte and buffa. They wanted to create a sketch comedy show, taking the best of modern comedy and opera to make a laugh-a-minute opera for Fringe audiences today. Writer Leo Doulton adds “*Everything on the list is something I’ve been told a good opera must include - even the pantomime camel, which my sister’s been asking for for three years.”* Opera’s self-contradictory traditions collide with sketch comedy for a farcical show.

This is **Virtually Opera**’s Edinburgh Fringe debut. Their work combines opera with other forms ranging from [pulp vampire movies](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_0D0oG60Zw) to [clowning](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5tp1dwKJ-Y&list=UU3HsOjjiZ7TV9_si_27ZWLQ&index=13), broadening it into a form for everyone. They regularly film digital shorts, turning classic opera arias into [YouTube sketches in a range of genres](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3HsOjjiZ7TV9_si_27ZWLQ). We don’t want to make operas that appropriate another form, but an example of that other form that *needs* to be fused with opera to be fulfilled artistically.

**Peter Davis** has previously written for EXAUDI, the London Contemporary Dance School, and players of the LSO. **Leo Doulton**’s work has been performed in the UK, US, Canada, and Germany, and received a Francis Chagrin Award for *The Perfect Opera*. They previously created *The Left Fang* for Virtually Opera.

The cast includes Scottish Opera Emerging Artist **Erika Gundesen**, star of the Orchestra for the Earth’s Alpine Tour **Rosalie Warner**, and **Samuel James Dewese**, who debuted the title role of John Henry for Tête à Tête in 2018.



*The Perfect Opera* will have its London preview at Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival 2019.

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“*hilarious and thoughtful… I am sure it will divert and excite audiences everywhere it is heard*” **Professor Julian Anderson, Composer**