

We are proud to present . . .

The Bear is the second of the two operas by William Walton, described by Walton himself as an "Extravaganza in One Act" involving just 3 characters. The libretto was written by Paul Dehn and Walton based on the play of the same title by Anton Chekhov (which is also sometimes translated into English as *The Boor*).

Walton received a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation in 1958, and he dedicated the opera "to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky". He began composing in 1965 when the Aldeburgh Festival in England requested an opera from him. *The Bear* was first performed at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh on 3 June 1967.

Synopsis . . .

We begin in the drawing room of Yelena Ivanovna Popova's country house, Mme Popova has not left home since her husband died a year ago, and as she tells her servant Luka she is determined things should stay that way: "I shall never go out.... Why should I? My life is already at an end. He is in his grave, and I have buried myself between four walls.... We are both dead." Luka tried to change her mind to no avail.

Her husband was certainly no angel – he repaid her devotion with endless affairs, leaving her alone while he spent her money and chased other women – but she intends to prove her love for him despite his faults by giving up her own happiness, buried alive in the home they shared caring for his beloved horse Toby.

Their argument is interrupted by a knock at the door, and enters Smirnov – a frustrated oats salesman owed over one thousand two hundred rubles by Popova's dead husband. She insists she does not have the money to pay – but Smirnov is not taking "no" for an answer and refuses to leave.

The more they argue, the more impressed he is by her fire and spirit until she demands he leaves, calling him "a bear" and he challenges her to a duel, for which she is happy to dig out her husband's old pistols as long as Smirnov can show her how to fire them – and in the hope of shooting him through the head.

It's too late for Smirnov though, he's already smitten: "She is a woman! That's the sort I can understand! A real woman! Gunpowder fireworks! I'm even sorry to have to kill her", Popova returns with the duelling pistols and then ...

About Us ...



William Stevens is a singer, conductor and singing teacher based in Cardiff. He is in his final year of study at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama where he studies with Donald Maxwell and Michael Pollock. Future engagements include *Superintendent Budd* in Britten's 'Albert Herring' (RWCMD), *Fasolt* in Wagner's 'Das Rheingold' (Tarnhelm Opera), *Sylvano* in Cavalli's 'La Calisto' (Longborough Festival Opera) and making his WNO debut as *Second Priest* in Dallapiccolo's 'Il prigioniero'. Future performances as a conductor include Brahms' 'Ein deutsches Requiem' (Serenata Singers) and Mozart's 'Die Entführung aus dem Serail' (Cardiff Opera).

Bristol based Mezzosoprano and singing teacher **Rebecca Chellappah** holds a Masters in Music with Distinction from the Royal Northern College of Music, UK. Rebecca enjoys an international career in opera and on the concert stage. Her opera roles include the title role of *Carmen* in Bizet's *Carmen*, *Delilah* in Saint-Saëns *Samson and Delilah* and *Rosina* in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Upcoming roles include the title role of *Helene* in *La belle Helene* by Offenbach with Bristol Opera in April and *Hermia* in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with New Opera Singapore in Aug. You can follow or contact Rebecca on her webpage www.rebeccachellappah.com or on her Facebook page.

Brendan Casey hails from New Zealand where he completed a B.Mus in vocal performance at Victoria University. He has performed with New Zealand Opera, Southern Opera, White Horse Opera, Bristol Opera and Tessitura to name a few. His roles include *Don Giovanni*, *Carmen*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *The Vampire*, *La Traviata*, *La Boheme*, *Fidelio*, *Falstaff* as well as *Chess*, *Whistle Down the Wind*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Les Miserables*. Oratorio includes *Messiah*, *St John Passion*, *St Matthew Passion*, *German Requiem* (Brahms), *Missa Solemnis* (Mozart). He is active in the Southwest as a Musical Director, performer and teacher.

Phil Blandford has 20 years' experience of professional music work, a degree in Music from Bristol University and an Advanced Certificate from the Associated Board (equivalent to today's DipABRSM). An accomplished classical pianist, he can play advanced repertoire at short notice. He works as a solo pianist, in jazz bands, in function bands, with singers, in pit orchestras, in ballet schools, as a rehearsal pianist for shows and operas and as a silent film accompanist. Highlights include supporting Grammy Award winner Concha Buika and Eliades Ochoa (Buena Vista Social Club). <http://www.bristolpianist.co.uk>