

ARTIST OPEN CALL: IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST 2026

If it would be more accessible to have this information in another format, please email bridget@mahoganyopera.co.uk

Dunedin Consort, Hera and Mahogany Opera present *In the Belly of the Beast*, a new project bringing to life Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's *Cantates Bibliques*.

An hour-long music theatre performance, bringing together the unique intimacy of the baroque cantata for voice and continuo with a completely contemporary theatrical approach, to tell three urgent stories about how we survive the unfairness of a fallen world. Three works from de la Guerre's *Cantates Bibliques* (Adam, Jonah, Jephthah), translated by Toria Banks and produced in partnership by Mahogany Opera, Dunedin Consort and Hera for UK performances in 2026.

Following the success of our 2023 co-production [Out of Her Mouth](#) ("A revelation...a pulsing, vibrant slice of music drama... raw storytelling and powerful drama", 5* *The Times*), based on three other works from the *Cantates Bibliques*, we are developing a new staging of these exceptional baroque pieces which have never been performed in the UK. Toria Banks' new English translation and direction from Jennifer Fletcher will make these remarkable works immediate for a contemporary audience, and draw out the enduring power of ancient myths.

In the beginning, a woman's voice in the darkness. "The world was made."

We're now launching an open call to find a soprano to perform in Jonah and Jephthah alongside Carolyn Sampson, and a scenographer / costume designer to work with the award-winning Joshua Pharo to create designs for the production.

The designer role is part of Mahogany Opera's Jerwood Opera Designer's Award. Each opportunity comes with additional professional development support for the artist from the producing partners.

We value diverse perspectives and would like to receive applications from a broad range of artists, including disabled and neurodivergent people. We are committed to making these opportunities as inclusive and accessible as possible, including – but not only – by budgeting for access costs.

You can listen to recordings of [Jonah](#) and [Jephthah](#) on Spotify.

Who are we looking for?

Soprano:

Playing age in 20s

vocal range: D4-A5

role: Storyteller/Jonah; Jephthah's daughter

In *Jonah*, the singer tells the story of Jonah and the whale, using text and music together to communicate directly with the audience and conjure up the different elements of the narrative in front of them. Sometimes, she enters into the story, in character as Jonah, or as the sailors who throw him into the sea to save themselves. The singer needs to be able to hold the audience and bring the piece to life, as it shifts quickly in tone and between different perspectives, navigating between wit and sincere emotional connection.

Jephthah is the story of a man, who having promised God a sacrifice of the first living thing he sees when he returns home after a successful battle, keeps his promise by sacrificing his only daughter. Unlike in the Handel oratorio (but as in the Bible), the story ends with the girl's death. Here, Jephthah's wife (Carolyn Sampson) and daughter tell us the story. As well as the storytelling skills needed in *Jonah*, we are looking for someone to play his daughter who can create a strong connection with another singer, and for that relationship to live physically as well as vocally.

Designer:

We are looking for a designer who

- will bring a distinct style/voice to the project
- with experience of designing sets / costumes for performance (opera or otherwise)
- is interested in integrating access into performance
- would benefit from mentoring and career support (for any reason)

Mentoring and Artist Development

Hera will support the selected singer with coaching from internationally-acclaimed mezzo-soprano and teacher Linda Hirst, and by arranging career mentoring tailored to their needs.

Mahogany Opera's Artistic Director Frederic Wake-Walker and designer Joshua Pharo will support the designer during the project, and provide career guidance and mentoring as desired.

Schedule

February 2026	Sing-through / play-through day
March 2026	White card meeting
April 2026	Full design presentation
April 2026	Feedback on designs / budgeting
May 2026	Sign off designs
14-18 June 2026	Rehearsals
19 June – 12 July 2026	Performances in Scotland & England, dates tbc

NB Successful candidates will need to guarantee availability for these dates; NAs will not be granted.

Fees

Fees are above MU/ITC minimums, and you are welcome to contact us in advance of applying to find out more about our fee proposals. All travel and accommodation will be covered during the project

How to apply

To apply please submit:

- EITHER a written statement, no more than one side of A4 OR a video/audio recording of up to 3 minutes explaining why you'd like to be part of this project.
- A CV
- An access rider, or details of any access requirements, if applicable.
- **For singers:** one (1) recording of around three minutes of you performing (this can be video or audio and doesn't need to be professionally recorded or from a performance context, although it should be accompanied if possible). It does need to be something baroque—possible composers could include, but are not limited to, Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini, Claudio Monteverdi, Henry Purcell, George Frideric Handel. Baroque is a style but to avoid confusion please send a recording of a work written before 1750. We will use these recordings to make a shortlist for live auditions.
- **For designers:** a portfolio with links to at least two projects or pieces of work you've been part of that help evidence your working style and methods. This could be video, or other forms of documentation e.g. websites, photos, press.

Please send to Bridget Rennie at Mahogany Opera bridget@mahoganyopera.co.uk by **9am on Wednesday 15 October**. To enable us to monitor the diversity of the candidates we are attracting, we also ask all applicants to complete our anonymous diversity monitoring form; this can be done online here:

<https://forms.gle/Ed5jjoY22k4BJTSE7>

- We will make a shortlist, and notify all applicants by the end of Friday 7 November.
- Interviews with designers will take place on Tuesday 18 November (London or remote)
- Auditions for singers will take place on Wednesday 19 November (London) and Thursday 20 November (Edinburgh).
 - For singers, we will ask you to prepare two pieces: one baroque aria and recitative (different to the recording sent with your application), and one folk song. At least one of these pieces should be sung in English.
 - An accompanist will be provided.
- You can choose the location most convenient to you.
- Some travel bursaries are available.
- We will hold auditions in accessible venues.

- Please let us know after shortlisting if you have any access queries about the auditions or interviews.

About Dunedin Consort

[Dunedin Consort](#) is one of the world's leading Baroque ensembles, recognised for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Its ambition is to allow listeners to hear early music afresh, and to couple an inquisitive approach to historical performance with a commitment to commissioning and performing new music. Under the direction of John Butt, the ensemble has earned two coveted Gramophone Awards, a BBC Music Magazine Award, and a Grammy nomination. In 2021 it was the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society Ensemble Award.

About HERA

Formed in 2018, [Hera](#) presents inclusive, accessible opera by women and gender minority artists, past and present, on tour and online. Hera is co-led by writer and director Toria Banks, and veteran singer and teacher Linda Hirst. Intergenerational collaboration and support is central to all their work. As well as commissioning new work - from 8 composers so far - Hera champions the performance of existing dramatic music by women. Past projects include: digital opera *We Ask These Questions of Everybody* ('politically important and an artistic triumph' 5 stars, The i); *Out of Her Mouth* ('a revelation' 5 stars, The Times); *Houseplants: a photo opera*, a digital commission from The Space; and *On an Endless Road*, a concert tour featuring Japanese biwa performer Akiko Kubota.

About Mahogany Opera

[Mahogany Opera](#) is a leading commissioner and producer of new opera and music theatre. Since 2014, we have created 26 new commissions and toured them extensively across the UK and internationally, receiving many accolades and awards for our boundary-pushing and inclusive work.

We are committed to developing diverse artists and audiences through three programmes:

New Works – developing, commissioning and producing new staged works with a wide range of artists and organisations

Snappy Operas – award-winning participatory young people's programme

Meet Me @ Mahogany – discussions, events & workshops exploring & opening up the process of making new work