

# SNAPPY OPERAS

## COMMISSION BRIEF

### WHAT IS A SNAPPY OPERA?

A Snappy Opera is a ten-minute opera for children which introduces all the essential elements of opera – singing, acting and making – in fun, colourful and bite-size chunks. Mahogany Opera has now commissioned thirteen Snappy Operas, written by some of the UK’s top composers and writers, who worked with groups of young people to develop stories and characters that appeal widely and connect directly to the young people who will perform them.

Each piece is designed to be performed by a class of around 30 Key Stage 2 children (ages 7-11 years old), although younger or older children may perform it. While all our Snappy Operas are designed to be as inclusive as possible, in 2022-23 we developed our first Snappy Opera in partnership with a SEND school, co-creating a piece which responded to the needs and ideas of a range of disabled children. Every character in a Snappy Opera is represented by a group of children; there are no main parts and no chorus which makes for a wonderfully non-hierarchical production where everyone is fully involved the whole time.

Each piece is orchestrated with its own small band of up to three instruments but there is also a piano only version. A Snappy Opera can be produced very simply with minimal props or with an elaborate set and costumes, inspired by design packs created for each opera. They can be performed in any kind of space - classroom, hall or theatre – and either on their own or as part of a set.

### THE STRUCTURE OF A SNAPPY OPERA

Below is an example of a typical Snappy Opera structure for reference. Creative teams do not have to follow this structure, though we hope you will find this useful in your initial thoughts around this. Current Snappy Operas are varied in their structure – examples of existing Snappy Operas are available on request. Please note – general structures should be agreed with the Mahogany Opera core team by including details in the ‘Submission of Treatment’ (see Delivery Deadlines below).

- *There are no restrictions on the content of a Snappy Opera. However, all characters/elements in the piece should be represented by a group of children and not an individual, to remain true to the Snappy Operas philosophy of a non-hierarchical production (though optional solo lines can be included). There is flexibility with number of characters that can be included in a Snappy Opera, but the cast of children should only be split into a maximum of three groups at any one time.*
- *Many existing Snappy Operas have two scenes that are punctuated by an event/change/arrival:*
  - *Scene 1*
    - *All the characters/elements are introduced (the last group to be introduced might cause the punctuation between the scenes)*
    - *Something inherent with the group(s) that start the piece establishes where we are physically (e.g. smugglers = we’re in a harbour; snow wolves = in a cold forest)*
    - *There’s something about the dynamic between the characters that creates a suspense/conflict*
  - *Scene 2*
    - *After the punctuation, there is a response which results in a resolution/avoidance of disaster/cliff-hanger etc.*

*Due to the limited rehearsal time in a Snappy Opera project, the amount of different musical and textural material should be limited – we recommend that each group should have no more than four major chunks of material.*

### **INPUT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

The piece will be developed in partnership with the Dunedin Consort and a group of young people from a primary school in Cumbernauld, Dunbartonshire, during two in-school workshops (see below). The content, structure and style of the piece is up to the composer and librettist, but the young people's abilities, ideas and interests along with curriculum-based topics should be considered and accommodated in the piece.

### **DIFFICULTY LEVEL**

The piece should be simple enough to be put together in a relatively short amount of time – the 6 hours that Mahogany Opera can dedicate to each work (divided over 3 separate workshops) should suffice to teach the children how to sing and perform the work. The piece should be scalable with varying levels of difficulty to accommodate different skill levels (e.g. optional harmonies for more advanced performers). However, there should be a baseline competency level that will enable young people with little experience of music and performing to be involved.

### **SCORING/ACCOMPANIMENT**

The piece should be scored for a keyboard instrument and up to two additional instruments. For the premiere performance of this new piece, the musicians will be artists from the Dunedin Consort, so consideration should be given to incorporating Baroque instruments. 'Open' parts (i.e. treble/bass parts for any relevantly pitched instrument) may be used, and pre-recorded or found instruments could also be incorporated.

When selecting instruments, we advise the composer to think about the flexibility and future life of the project. Mahogany will engage professional musicians for the performances, however, to ensure future performances, we envisage young amateur players might perform it, and therefore the level of difficulty should be taken into consideration (e.g. maximum grade 8 level of difficulty). A reduced piano version will also be required. The choice of instruments should be discussed with Mahogany Opera before any decisions are finalised.

### **DELIVERY DEADLINES\***

- January 2025: Attendance at in-school workshop with young people to gather and explore themes & ideas.
- February 2025: Submission of initial treatment. To include synopsis and dramaturgical structure identifying character groups and examples of the different musical and textual chunks of material for review by Mahogany team.
- March 2025: Attendance at in-school workshop with young people to test material and explore further ideas.
- April 2025: First draft version of the vocal score or full score– feedback from Mahogany Opera core team.
- May 2025: Submission of a completed version of the full score, the vocal score, libretto, and instrumental parts.
- June 2025: Performance of the piece
- July 2025: Edits and amends of all scores and parts, based on feedback from the rehearsal process and performance of the piece.

*\*Exact dates to be confirmed. Overall schedule of activity is subject to change.*

### **RECORDING**

Learning tracks will be recorded to aid in the learning of the piece by the young people. Dates and details of these recordings to be confirmed.

### **FUTURE LIFE**

The piece will form part of a set of Snappy Operas. The commissioning agreement will grant Mahogany Opera non-exclusive rights to present the piece for an initial period of 5 years. The piece will receive its premiere in June 2025, as a standalone in-school performance, with minimal set and costumes. The piece will then receive a full public premiere, with set and costumes, alongside other existing Snappy Operas, as part of the Snappy Operas Festival in 2026.

Future Snappy Opera Festivals will be held biennially, with occasional bespoke performances in between. As part of the Snappy Operas set, the piece will not be guaranteed performances at each Snappy Opera Festival – operas are to be selected from the set, in consultation with our partners, to best match the ages, abilities and interests of the young people involved.

### **FEE**

We can offer an inclusive fee of £3,500 for the composer and £2,000 for the librettist.

This fee includes all R&D and workshop attendance

We will cover all necessary travel, accommodation and reasonable expenses.

Any required access costs will also be paid in addition to the agreed fee.

Please note, we are unable to cover travel expenses for artists living outside of the UK.

The final performance will be un-ticketed and/or free of charge, and therefore no further royalties will be payable. Should the piece be published, recorded or broadcast, this will be covered by a further agreement.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### About Mahogany Opera

Mahogany Opera Group is a leading commissioner and producer of new opera and music theatre. We work across the UK and internationally. Our vision of opera as an inclusive, collaborative, and dynamic artform informs our aim to stretch the boundaries of what opera can be and who it is for.

Through our work, we aim to:

- Share the power and joy of live music and theatre widely, demonstrating that opera can be relevant to and reflective of people's lives
- Show that everyone is an artist with the potential to play a creative role in making and performing new opera
- Give children and adults the opportunity to experience opera in inclusive environments
- Support diverse artists to develop their practice, spark new connections and create work on their own terms
- Present new work which reflects and amplifies diverse perspectives and a multiplicity of voices

We achieve our aims through three programmes of work:

**Snappy Operas** is our flagship participatory young people's programme. We've commissioned 13 Snappy Operas which have been created by primary school children alongside leading composers and writers, and performed by over 4,500 young people in over 100 schools. Through this programme we deliver in-school activity, teacher training and public performances in communities across the UK and internationally.

**Various Stages** is our pioneering Research & Development programme through which we support diverse artists to develop their practice and careers, explore the process of making new opera in new ways, trial new ideas, and challenge convention. We deliver open calls, R&D workshops, mentoring, discussion events, and public showcases. Various Stages also helps us to identify new artists for commissioning projects. Since 2016 we have supported 115 artists through workshops, programmes of mentoring, and sharings.

**Commissioning** innovative work for the stage, we work with professional and non-professional artists in partnership with a wide range of organisations. Our commissions have been performed across the UK and internationally at a wide range of venues and festivals. Since 2014 we have created 23 new commissions and toured them extensively, receiving many accolades and awards for our boundary-pushing and inclusive work.

Beyond the work itself, Mahogany Opera is a creative space for the development of new ideas and the sparking of new connections – a place where people can encounter music and theatre for the first time, where artists can forge new creative relationships and where time is given for research, reflection and discussion. Our approach is deeply collaborative and defined by people – by a belief that everyone involved has a creative role to play and that includes, crucially, the audience.

[www.mahoganyopera.co.uk](http://www.mahoganyopera.co.uk)

### About Dunedin Consort

Dunedin Consort is one of the world's leading Baroque ensembles, recognised for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Formed in 1995 and named after Din Eidyn, the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle, Dunedin Consort's 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.



Dunedin Consort performs regularly at major festivals and venues across the UK and abroad, and enjoys close associations with the BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Edinburgh International Festival and Lammermuir Festival. Alongside its performance and recording work, Dunedin Consort is committed to a wide-ranging education programme both in schools and in the wider community. In inspiring and encouraging musical participation, developing vocal skills and fostering a love of classical music, historical performance and new music, Dunedin Consort aims to develop and nurture its potential audience and to encourage the performers of the future.

Dunedin Consort is an enthusiastic champion and commissioner of contemporary music, and in recent years has premiered a new set of orchestral dances at the BBC Proms, a new opera by Errollyn Wallen at the Barbican Centre, and new choral music for its a cappella consort. In 2024 it premiered a new guitar concerto by Cassandra Miller for Sean Shibe, the first instalment of a 3-year co-commissioning series which will see further new music by David Fennessy and Tansy Davies.

[www.dunedin-consort.org.uk](http://www.dunedin-consort.org.uk)