



ROBE

p3.	Contents
p4.	People
p5.	Synopsis
p6.	Libretto
p21.	Programme Note
p22.	Directors' Note
p22.	Biographies

Rowan, the Mapmaker: Clara Kanter
Neachneohain, the Official: Rosie Middleton
Beira, the Soldier: Sarah Parkin
The Storyteller: Kelly Poukens
EDINBURGH: Rosie Middleton & Sarah Parkin

Dancers: Charlie Naylor, Thomas Page, Moses Ward

Actors: Keith Chilvers, Megan Moran

Piano: Ben Smith
Flute: Jenni Hogan

Words & Music: Alastair White
Co-Director: Gemma A. Williams
Co-Director: Pamela Schermann
Music Director: Ben Smith
Choreographer: Max Gershon
Fashion: Michael Stewart
Design: Brian Archer
Hair: Radio Hair Salon
Make-up: Astrid Kearney assisted by The London School of Makeup LSM Pro Team.
Executive Producer: Julian Wilkins
Produced by UU Studios

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Synopsis:

PART I 'THE PARTY'S OVER': OMENS | SPEECHES | ROWAN'S VISION | NEACHNEOHAIN'S VISION | THE ARMING OF ROWAN, THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

PART II 'THE PORCELAIN ORCHARD': DREAMS AND AWAKENINGS | EDINBURGH | BEIRA'S VISION | EPILOGUE

In a society where the real and the virtual is no longer meaningful, a powerful new being threatens the stability which holds these worlds together. Two elders, Neachneohain and Beira, convince the young cartographer Rowan to complete a terrible task: descend into the mind of the superintelligence EDINBURGH and map this creature so as to grant its desire - to become a living city, teeming with human life and activity. Witnessing visions of the awful realness of life beyond cyberspace, Rowan agrees - plunging into its depths: a strange, abstract world of data and dream. _
30 years later, Rowan and EDINBURGH have fallen in love, have lived their lives together. Though every morning she awakes with no memory of the past, Rowan has almost completed the map that EDINBURGH desires. But into this map Rowan has woven something else: something hidden, silent, unsaid. As these rifts in the structure undo causality itself, she must answer the question: what exactly has she created? And what does it have to do with this strange, otherworldly figure who sings the red song of a forgotten city - of an ancient, poisoned ROBE...

I. THE PARTY'S OVER

BEIRA:

Last night I walked to the edge with my daughter.
It was as though cracked glass had been hung
white pillars of data in poles upon the loch.

All night constellations filled with their song.
Oak and apple impaled. Grey parabolas
 piercing to
eggshells, warrens, the shuffle beneath the Fieldfare

motionless reaching to root and dew.
Calling to Rowan, as though it knew...

My old friend.
Now is the time to act.
Almost the edges are pierced and trembling.
My old friend.
You must speak for us, now.
Speak for we who are silent.

NEACHNEOHAIN:

Aye, I will prepare myself.
Pray for white snow, for silence,
an end to this red, red song.

THE STORYTELLER:

*A song of redness'
woven cloak of river and thistle-leaf,
thorns and dog-claws writhing in the silence.
Words like hounds track the ruined highland,
speak the spell to flush mutton-chop and sheaf:
 the dull earth's silence.*

*A song of ox and worker,
of earth that turned, of horn and hand that curved
a second geometry. Spine, scar and nerve
fold shifting polygons of labour.
Silent, the turned earth's settler
dance: of leaf and nitrogen.*

A song of motion.

*A city: A map. A test
that asks, where is that voice. Where are they I heard between the numbers
in the spaces between the numbers and the words.*

This ROBE be a wrap of red and speech,

NEACHNEOHAIN:

I am speaking to Rowan, the Mapmaker,

THE STORYTELLER:

reams of data folded in the hemlines.

NEACHNEOHAIN:

to Rowan, Illuminator of lines.

THE STORYTELLER:

*Song of the Wavefunction's
strange, fleet silence*

NEACHNEOHAIN:

A private address, I will take no questions.

THE STORYTELLER:

flushed to mud like bleach.

NEACHNEOHAIN:

Dark eyelids of crescent moons
fixed in winks:
black lakes of space upon the lunar canyons

form themselves to signs. Abyssal ink
of the donut hole,
pots' emptiness. Like how steel links

hold the prisoner: absence and metal.
Great engine of the void
charging hedgehog and nettle,

lung and chlorophyll, toroid
and amphora's
black.

Intricate hardware but cladding and decoy

to the universal grammar:
under-cloth of space.
This, Rowan, is the unlikely hammer

by which we built the place.
Adapt, not discrete quanta,
contours to delineate cell and face,

*In the summer evenings, she would watch her working.
Forge lighting the shimmer of sweat.
She mopped silk across the bicep.
Drew her to her hips.
Drew her finger from her jawline to her lips.*

*"I am making a ROBE, for you my love
with red silk, crumb of the Cochineal bone.
To wrap you in bed in the night's long, black darkness,
the white noise of armies the, green of your vision-dreams.*

I am making a ROBE."

Ah...

ROWAN and THE STORYTELLER:

A song of redness...

BEIRA:

Rowan -
as you almost certainly know
- I once trained as a soldier.

It seems a lifetime ago. On Luna Station.
Between the reboot and recalibration.
It hurt to stand. Our shoulders

covered
with welts,
with boils and sores. Food-packs,
cardboard boxes, squares of cylindrical tin.
It seems a lifetime ago. On Luna Station.
We hauled them with velcro and polyester webbing
through the artificial gravity. The weight like a rack,

I have never forgotten it.
Never. Quarrelling over mess
tins. Squatting in a ditch like birds.
Between the reboot and recalibration.
These lines of code mean -

ROWAN:

- nothing but frightening augury.
"A faceless stillbirth. A comet in the sky.
The blinking, red, incessant diodes

of our ancestors." Let me work, here.
The party's over. Everyone else has gone.

THE STORYTELLER:

*The Warlord Q-el stood upon the battlefield,
Hey; hey; nonny; nonny; hi-ho.*

*This camp be a hall, this ditch a street.
A boy's mouth hung open on a heap.
Hey, hey, nonny; nonny, hi-ho.
The Warlord Q-el was knackered and filthy:
Hey, hey, nonny; nonny, hey:
His gown was torn, the gold crown buckled.
Gorse hung with eyeball and knuckle.
 The caught-hare's liver salted and bagged.
 Offal as thick as -
 as red as -*

the ROBE.

ROWAN:

I am sitting in my Grandmother's kitchen.
 Sugar beets dance in cascading tap-water.
 Scouring earth from their skin with a nailbrush
chaps my wrists. The water stream-cold, the soap burns.
 She is terrified of mice and germs.
 *Cubed beets scrubbed and sautéed to mush
pulped shapeless.* We pour wine, and tea, and porter;
 lay them between an urn and chicken.
 After dinner I sit with the women.
 I first made a picture that evening.
My hand pressing, and curving, and aching.

THE STORYTELLER:

*By a cottage,
a forge,
a scorched weave of silk,
by the bone-pile,
the bed
and the porcelain oak.*

*"Clear away the tattered cloth.
Pitch my tent in the ruined stone."*

*The weaver watched the warlord,
squatting in her ruined home
wrapped in gold and war-blackened wood.*

NEACHNEOHAIN:

I am standing by a window.
 Ameria maretima.
 Bone-white, turtle-blue.

Some boy pulls me through
 avocado-emerald
 vinyl, cast-iron, glass.

This is not the same map which once we built on.
'Crow-livers fume smog on the altar.
The sky is alive with the fire of the moon.'

It wants you, Rowan.
It has asked for you.

ROWAN:

Yet, I saw something in there that was beautiful.
Your age, perhaps, your wallpapered tomb.
But - small hands pushing through sleeves of lambswool,
the smell of hops and exhaust fumes.

Yes, I will go.
I will speak to this thing that grows within the silence.
Descend beneath into the depths of the code.
Well I know...

ROWAN, BEIRA and NEACHNEOHAIN:

By a clearing in the forest,
pricked a bear-shin with bores. Branches
pulled the birch to bent curves'
proscenium. Baroque ivy,
bone notes. Heels batter the mushroom patch.

Kagura-den on marshland.
Poked porcelain moulds with eyes.
Paint congeals: seashell on cypress.
Parados to clog and drumbeat,
Kataru and *Utai* by the calling of Harlequins.

Mahogany cluttered with cardboard and stale food.
Pixelated colour squares. 8-bit wail.
Party's mage at critical. Here
pausing's impossible. A robin lands
on the walnut tree, just beyond the edge of the window.

THE STORYTELLER:

The days following the battle were full of song and wine. The baggage-train swelled from the plunder of scavengers. Bacon-seller and stable-boy, politician and priest alike. All combed the throng for business and a hot meal. The discarded parts of those they'd lost, forgotten as the soil turned rich. Baskets were filled with squash and turnip. Sour, horrid cider took the chill of the evening till the cups drained to squirming wasps and flies - portents of summer and the harvest's plenty. It was the city's morning, and Q-el was pleased.

II. THE PORCELAIN ORCHARD

BEIRA and NEACHNEOHAIN together becoming EDINBURGH:

Shafts of light, cut like sun through shoals
blinking in the sea deep. Columns of cold
green, ghastly in their greenness: meat mould-
green cast across the black's scaffolds.
Emerald, pea-green, lime upon the poles
read: *Sol*, *Proxima*, *Quell'kar*, *Vax*.

The smell of magma and Rotorua,
badger dung, perhaps, wrappings and plastics
curled in flame. Tremors against the haptic
sensor, your tubing chafes to breathe a stoor
alchemic yet unquenching. To breathe the dour
fumes and behold, the primordial slapstick
Chaplinesque. Blinking, eyelids chapped, quick
sharp pain from the headsets' spoor.
And the trail spells: *Terra, Pangea, Topsoil, Sand.*
So you can turn your hand. The mesh's vectors shiver:
Shropshire, Shenandoah, Derry, Aberdeen.
Trace the looped palm, its pink, lopsided sliver
trails behind it marking glyph and letter:
Granny's Green, Fleshmarket, Morningside, Leith.
Sweat collects at the goggles' vacuum, itch
sog of the salt-stained stitching between pitch,
drift and push. And the black-blue plumes. Glitched
iridescence, pixels of egg-red kitsch
picking out from the epidermal pinkness.
Quills fluted to barbules, vanes cross-stitched
above filoplume and down: the dark's dress.
Feathers' wash VR as the wings beat anapaests.
Sounding: *Beast, fish, fowl, microbial, thing.*
The stench of crow odour, of droppings, is nauseating.
while the beaks and bills sing: *Atom, Proton, Quark, String*

EDINBURGH:

Wake up, little one.

Little, little fragile thing,
What in the world would you dream?

ROWAN:

I dreamed you dead, had died
from some strange consuming sickness.

My brother kept a coin with your picture.
When he spun it in the air, you moved in carousel.

EDIBURGH:

Little, little fragile thing,
what in the world would you dream?

ROWAN:

My brother kept a coin with your picture's golden redness.

I dreamed his face grew old, the coin
shined new. Vinegar and coca-cola

washed sores of kitchen work
and the spinning image.

ROWAN and THE STORYTELLER:

The nails of lovers, toilet breaks
refused by sullen ambition, lost cups
and trophies, beer foaming on the cobble-stone.

A pay-check, a warning.
A ring, a glass, a meal, a hand.
Like iron through the rim of a wedding-band,
the world shows itself in the edges of things.

EDINBURGH:

Wake up, little one.

THE STORYTELLER:

*Q-el made good from berries and rapeseed.
First mere barren paddock and rain-toil,
the city grows from battle-camp to mill-town.
Wealthy burghers trade jute and mandarins.
Tiles and cobbles mark the edges of things.
Lives shortened in typhoid and sodden gowns,
crushed to moments in the telling of a tale.
Q-el builds a court of lapis and honey-mead.*

*All but threads, all but a gown.
"I am making a ROBE for the Warlord Q-el."*

EDINBURGH:

Wake up, Rowan.

ROWAN:

Good morning, beautiful.
Why do you watch me sleeping?

EDINBURGH:

Wake up, Rowan.

ROWAN:

I dreamed about the world above, below.
The cities, children, rushing, impossible speed.

Tell me,
how long have I been here?

EDINBURGH:

Each morning is oblivion: river of Hell.
Each morning to return as from a deep, dark well

for 30 years. Since when you came to me,
half-drowned from the data-sea
mouthing your offer. A desk, and time's
gift of life above, the world of a city
I would make mine.

That name is all but written. A sea wind,
dreamt landwards as gulls.
Today is 30 years since

you arrived all gold and bluster, like thrown rice in the noonday sun.
You were young.
Full of fear and pride and brittleness. You stood as though to attention.

But not a soldier...

ROWAN:

Years of rice-meal, biro and papyrus
I learned the shapes of motion and change...

EDINBURGH:

I set the table with the code-work's plenty. Pomegranates, blackbeans, lemon wine.
You sat, dazed and mine.
We spoke of the beauties of the world above. The way hands touch. How fingers trace a jawline.

ROWAN:

With desk-toil traced your hind legs in bridges,
torso of sewage pipes, drainage and aqueduct.

Tollcross. Crag rock. Cobblestone. Bus stop.

EDINBURGH:

Unceasing motion.
Shifting polygons.

ROWAN:

Looped lines of circles knit, entwine.
Stitch tendons to the bit of spine by
telephone boxes, butcher-shops, the grocer's window...

A city is a weave of space and time.

O, Rowan,
to have given me my wish.
to have drawn me into the world,
a weave of land and mind.

ROWAN:

The cracks upon the lake, the salmon and crow-guts
spoiled and stinking. The shattered foundations of ramparts,
dams.

Snatched away, my hands, my eyes.
You have - you have tricked me. O, *30 years*.

EDINBURGH:

I set the table with the code-work's plenty.
I have - never - asked you for anything.

ROWAN:

You showed me a cheating vision.
My grandmother's house. My hands were small -

EDINBURGH:

Rowan. I know nothing of this at all.

That was not me.

Rowan.

You are scaring me.

I am powerless. I was alone, trapped.
I knew nothing of the world outside.
I knew nothing but you.

ROWAN:

I have wasted my life.
30 years ago two came to *me*.
I was drawing in the corner of a beautiful party
full of children and song. Snatched away,
my hands, my eyes.

EDINBURGH:

What are you saying?

You must complete the draft-work

you must complete the map
finish the city -

THE STORYTELLER:

Three decades of plenty and politic

ROWAN:

left Q-el, fat, prudent, power-sharpened.

THE STORYTELLER:

Little ones with no memory of the gorse-land,

ROWAN:

*the Blackwood, the hazel, the beauty of the vale:
these were now officers serving on his spacecraft,*

THE STORYTELLER:

governors overseeing sanitation and law.

ROWAN:

*The screens by the airport showed goat-horns of bog-myrtle,
bluebell, bell-heather, bog-bean, grain.*

THE STORYTELLER:

And yet still he woke early:

ROWAN:

He lay awake, watching.

*Show him the playhouse or shelf that lay empty:
Find him the shoulder or hand that is idle.
Filled in the marsh, the hill and the bogland*

*Q-el rode out into space and the blackness.
Kingsguard sallied the deep of the void.
He would colour the black of it, redden the blackness
redden, eliminate all the black edges.*

THE STORYTELLER:

*The weaver's hands ached, chapped with the poison.
Long grew the gown, the red of the ROBE.*

ROWAN:

You draw the god down to the city's
song, write its curve and brick with divinity,
pretentious graffiti in Doric, nucleic

spiral. Column and helix splattered with agency.
Geometry of stone pillar, of DNA.

THE STORYTELLER:

*But still you remember the knuckle and eyeball's
rotten compost fed trellis and berry row.*

ROWAN:

You draw down the godhead to contour and leyline,
mole burrow, dug mounds of beak-clutched grub.
Geometry of hillpath, cursus and motorway.

THE STORYTELLER:

*You approach the palace, cloth-work in hand.
Say, "wide is the fame of the ROBE's red.
I bring it today as a gift for the King."
You unfurl its redness, draped through the throneroom.
"All behold. The red of the ROBE."*

BEIRA:

I cannot see the river or the orchard,
cannot see the children's long-forgotten game

from rooms which overlook the river; rushing
summer currents cut the banks, the bee
heavy wind rustles under sill and pane,

pollen rife. Long oak and apple

plunge the hot grass with rotten fruit, off
sodden acorn. Through glass, orchard's red
propagates its likeness. Bad cider, dew.

The chair beside me is empty of you.

From rooms which overlook the orchard
I cannot see that room or its patient
of the room next to this room looking out.

The spill of fluid against the tile, fountains
in the rhythm of heartbeat and belly
plunge waste upon the porcelain.

Groaning as one whipped, or caged. The nurse works
with words tight and tired: 'just a little
more.' *O, Who are you crying out, you easing,*

*you watching the bee lying caught upon the paper
that dances like a dog in sleep...*

BEIRA and NEACHNEOHAIN together in the style of EDINBURGH:

Rowan - help me.

ROWAN:

The shatters and cracks-seams, the endless catastrophe.
It was not you.

I drew you a city,
not its map or plan.

Rather,
drew in that time
you held my hair above the pan
whispering.

Our first dance,
whirling giddy high above the snowstorm of code

and in love and horror the world went red as a whip,
a bowl, a moorhen's beak.

O, A land is neither words nor mud
but a red, red edge.

In those edges,
out the corner of our eyes,
the shameful, unrecorded silence of our lives
passes
without meaning or regret.

BEIRA and NEACHNEOHAIN together in the style of EDINBURGH:

A land is neither silence nor shame
but the gaudy tapestry of some red, red vest.

ROWAN:

Yet look - closely.

Out the corner of your eye...

...and the sky is red, red,
Edinburgh-red.

END

PROGRAMME NOTE by MIRANDA HEGGIE

A robe can be many things. Sure, it's a garment, but it can also be cover, a disguise, a costume or a uniform. It's also something composed of many different threads woven together to create something much bigger. It's these kinds of layers of multiplicity which form the basis of the inspiration for Scottish composer Alastair White's new opera, *ROBE*, premiering at this year's Tête à Tête opera festival. Scored only for piano, flute and four female voices, the opera creates a layered matrix of worlds within worlds, exploring complex networks between stories, history and experiences. 'It's meant to be about the real experience of living in a city today,' says White. 'That's something you can't sum up in a single story. It's about the collision of multiple perspectives, multiple stories coming together and being contained in a single structure.'

The main 'character' in the opera is the superintelligence EDINBURGH, whose desire is to become a living city. It's a role sung by two singers at once. Soprano Sarah Parkin and mezzo-soprano Rosie Middleton work together with interweaving vocal melodies to bring to life this complex character. 'Edinburgh, the city, is full of its own myths. You can see that clearly in the architecture,' comments White. Though named after the place where White studied for his undergraduate degree, the role could represent any city in the world, where countless individuals, each with their own unique experiences and narratives, come together in a jostling melee.

'In our post-truth society, when there's no such thing as a stable reality, or a stable temporality, how do you reclaim your own agency?' asks White. '*ROBE* expands on this idea. It looks at the meaning within community. Not just within yourself but society, when we're living in this kind of piecemeal world that's composed of your own experience and then public official history, such as the news. On top of that, virtual reality, internet, fiction, movies and books combine to create a disorientating multiplicity of contrasting stimuli. The piece seeks to work out how you reorganise all that to give yourself meaning.'

'In *ROBE* the compositional language is based around large twelve-note all-interval chords, which repeat or mirror their intervals in inversion after the tritone at the centre. All those rows contain two triads which form a polychord. From that single structure, you can create three additional structures, which in turn create their own wealth of material and work by forming each other's recontextualization within the piece. So, from that there are not just different characters, but different worlds within the opera.'

To create such detail with an ensemble of only two is no mean feat, and both flautist Jenni Hogan and pianist and music director Ben Smith have been heavily involved in the development of the music. 'Doing that kind of world-building with only two instrumentalists wouldn't be possible without collaboration with musicians like Jenni and Ben' says White. Hogan makes use of movement in her playing, and both players continually push the boundaries of what's possible with their instruments.

White's route to composition is far from conventional. After completing a degree in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, he moved to London 'on a whim' with his alt-rock band White Heath. Though he had 'no notational skills at all', he taught himself the basics of harmony and notation from books in the Barbican Library, plus a couple of websites, in between his shifts in a call centre. He then embarked on a master's in composition in 2016 at Goldsmiths University, where he is currently studying for a PhD in composition under Roger Redgate. 'I first learned about music through rock and roll' says White. 'I played piano in White Heath for about ten years, but it was only when I moved down to London, I discovered what you could do with larger musical canvasses; the things that you could say and the worlds that you could create. I became really excited by composition. When you're creating rock and roll, you're creating a sound, or perhaps even more of a feeling. Learning about notation was so much fun! It was like an entire new world was opening up. You're creating a document that then creates a performance – the tension there is fascinating.' It's certainly quite an unusual musical beginning for a classical composer who counts Brian Ferneyhough and Elliott Carter among his influences.

The way the music reflects the characters has more to do with the characters' experiences, than their personal attributes. 'People exist at any moment in this flux of stimuli and sensations' says White. 'These are much more important than any inherent qualities. So, the music exists much more on the point of the moment rather than the baggage the characters bring with them. It's situational as opposed to inherent – the libretto and the music are much more interested in what the characters are feeling and experiencing in a single moment than the overarching narrative of the piece.' 'There's not one perspective to understand it from' explains White. 'Everybody comes together to experience it, and for me, that's where meaning happens. It exists in between the people in the seats and in between the people in the production, and somewhere above that, whatever that ephemeral, intangible thing that is called 'community'. That's where we're trying to create meaning.'

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Miranda Heggie is a music journalist and arts administrator based between Birmingham and Scotland. She read music at the University of Edinburgh and has written reviews and features for The Herald, The List and The Arts Desk as well as programme notes for Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Scottish Ballet. This programme note is a reworking of an interview with the composer first published on theartsdesk.com on Wednesday 31st July 2019.

DIRECTORS' NOTE

Gemma A Williams:

ROBE is a new opera about worlds and cities, relationships and experiences, juxtaposing times and histories. As directors, the task was to create visual maps of these fragmented, evocative worlds. Collaborative teams from set designers to choreographers pondered Alastair's poetic libretto, teasing out meanings and cues from its dense, meticulous text to create what you see here tonight. The dramatic and layered music, under Ben's direction, shifts from cyberspaces to real worlds as decades pass alluded to here by distorted figures and otherworldly, growing forms. Anchored by flowing costumes from an ancient future, and transformed by hair and make-up, the performers are the ultimate detail that draw you into this world. Thank you to Tete-a-Tete for having us back. We hope you enjoy ROBE.

Pamela Schermann:

When I was first approached about co-directing this opera, I was thrilled - not only for the opportunity to work on this exciting contemporary piece, but at the collaborative approach employed. Set design and props, a fashion designer, a choreographer, music director and an ensemble of dancers, two actors and an actor-musician work together with us and four extremely talented singers to create this fascinating piece. I love working on contemporary operas and exploring all the dramatic possibilities this style of music offers - and the atmosphere it creates. The music describes the setting and sets the scene for the drama, while at the same time, it allows a range of different interpretations.

BIOGRAPHIES

Brian Archer is a designer and maker working in TV, film and live events. His work can be seen in the movies *The Mapmaker*, *Kill Your Idols*, *Cockneys vs Zombies*, the award-winning shorts *Scratch* and *Bistro*, and the live cinematic event *Lost In London*. Recent TV work includes *Waterloo Road* and *Killing Eve* (BBC). His creations have been seen at Southbank Centre, The Place and BAC.

Max Gershon has choreographed, performed and collaborated on fashion shows for a range of emerging designers such as KaWakey and A-Cold-Wall as well as luxury powerhouse Burberry. Other projects include JC Candanedo's set of 'motion pictures' (Vogue Italia), performances with the Royal Ballet School (White Lodge) led by Bim Malcomson, and work as a Tate Exchange artist with Tate Modern.

Jenni Hogan's recent highlights include performances at St John Smith's Square, Barbican, BBC1 and Radio 3, at Darmstadt, Principal Sound, London Ear, with Decibels, and Bastard Assignments. Jenni has appeared as an improviser in numerous film scores (with three premieres in the last 18 months). Jenni is the recipient of the Stanley Burton Scholarship at Leeds University, where she begins her PhD in October 2019.

Clara Kanter studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. She performed in Stockhausen's *Mittwoch aus Licht* for Birmingham Opera Company and Berio's *Coro* with the Lucerne Festival Academy under Sir Simon Rattle. She also sang 'Winnie' in Mike Christie's opera *The Miller's Wife* at Grimeborn. She recently sang 'The Boy' in Kurt Weill's opera *The Tsar Has His Photograph Taken*.

Astrid Kearney is an International Makeup Designer, Creative Consultant and Educator. Astrid's passion for project based briefs have enabled her to actively share her extensive creative experience and engage with creative teams on developmental strategies within productions, editorially and on commercials worldwide. www.astridkearney.com

Mezzo-soprano **Rosie Middleton** specialises in contemporary music, and collaborates with composers internationally. Contemporary opera work includes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (ROH Linbury Theatre), *#EchoChamber* (Tjarnarbio, Reykjavik and Tête à Tête Festival), *A Certain Sense of Order* (Tête à Tête Festival and Theatre du Centaure Luxembourg), and Emily Howard's *Ada Sketches*.

Charlie Nayler studies at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and is a working actor. He recently gained a place with Ballet Boyz, training in their programme dancer's course.

Thomas Page is a contemporary dance artist and Artistic Director of 'Thomas Page Dances.' Since founding the company in 2016, Thomas has become a FreeSpace Artist of Studio Wayne McGregor, associate artist of The Old Fire Station and SPARK Artist 2019/20 of The Pegasus Theatre.

Soprano **Sarah Parkin** (MMus, PGDip -RNCM; BMus - UofT) Recent roles: The Writer (*WEAR*, UU Studios for Tête-à-Tête); Eumene (*Xerse*, Ensemble Orquesta for Grimeborn); Poppea (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*); Miss Wordsworth (*Albert Herring*, Left Bank Opera Festival). Sarah currently appears in *A Certain Sense of Order* (tick tock opera) and in concert with vocal ensemble 11-11.

Belgian soprano **Kelly Poukens** - winner Stiftung Blatow prize 2018, Germany / 2nd Prize Honda Competition 2017, Belgium/ etc. - made an international impression with Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine* and Berio's *Sequenza III*. Recent highlights include "Trio Girl" in Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* (Dutch National Opera), "La servante" in Massenet's *Manon* (Théâtre des Champs-Élysées), and "Regan" in *King Lear* (Holland Opera).

Ben Smith is a London-based composer and performer specialising in contemporary music. He is interested in – amongst other things – phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and compositional encounters with silence and repetition. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and from Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2018, where he studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks. www.bensmithmusic.co.uk

Michael Stewart is a womenswear designer based in London who graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2017. His work explores ancient cultures and the relevance they have to contemporary society.

Pamela Schermann has directed several plays, operas and musicals in the UK and abroad, including *Cry Havoc* at Park Theatre, *Othello* at the Rose Playhouse and in New York City, and the award-nominated opera production *Mozart & Salieri* at the Arcola Theatre and on tour. She is artistic director of Opera in the City Festival.

Moses Ward studied at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. He has recently performed at the Bonnie Bird Theatre and Greenwich Theatre working with Kennedy Muntanga Dance Theatre, and with Michael Clark Company performing *OH MY GODDESS*.

Alastair White is a Scottish composer and writer who has created multidisciplinary work for festivals, institutions and ensembles in Britain and America. Currently pursuing a PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London, he speaks internationally on the relationship between music, politics and philosophy. www.alastairwhite.org

Gemma A. Williams is a curator, writer and director. Her interests lie in emerging designers and the creation of new narrative possibilities for fashion. Author of the book *Fashion China* (Thames & Hudson, 2015), she has curated exhibitions in the UK and Ireland, and co-directed the touring opera *WEAR*. [@gemmacurates](https://twitter.com/gemmacurates)

Julian Wilkins is a solicitor and mediator, and recently qualified as an arbitrator. His work mainly concerns the creative industries and media industries, especially about intellectual property. Also a writer having entered various script competitions, Julian contributes to various journals and lectures on IP.