



presents

Programme

£2.00

1944: Home Fires

Episode 8 of A Gay Century

Music by Robert Ely

Libretto by Peter Scott-Presland

Stage Direction by Emily Beech

Conductor Joe Tobin

Website: www.homopromos.org

homopromos@gmail.com

020 7277 5014

With the support
of:

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DIORAMA
A RTS
C ENTRE

CAST

Ivor Novello	Alfred Mitchell
'Mad' Frankie Fraser	Kieran Rayner
Clara Novello Davies	Olivia Bell
Warder	Anthony Stuart Lloyd

MUSICIANS

Henriette Poos	Harp
Louisa Kataria	Alto Saxophone
Emilija Auskalnyte	Tenor Saxophone

BACKSTAGE TEAM

Jack Campbell	Repetiteur
Liana Gibbs	Lighting designer
Kevin Moore	Stage Manager
Tom Burgering	Poster Design
Zoe Knowles	Photographs
John Brand	Lighting adviser

It is May 1944. The scene is a cell in HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

For a copy of the libretto, scan here:



Or go to:

<https://jackcampbell.uk/hft>

ABOUT THE COMPANY – in alphabetical order



EMILIA AUSKENLYTE [*tenor sax*] is a classical saxophonist based in London. Born and raised in Lithuania, she started her musical journey at the age of 6 and soon after started performing and participating in various local and international competitions. In 2016, her achievements were noticed, and she was included in the autobiography book: *Who Will Be Who: The Future of Lithuania*. Her deep interest in performing arts led her to theatre where she had the privilege of working and creating various characters on stage under the tutelage of Lithuanian director Alvydas Vizgirda. After graduating high school, she continued her musical journey at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with teachers Josef Pacewicz, also receiving masterclasses from Arno Bornkamp, Tim McAllister, Amy Dickson, and Marcus Weiss. She is currently studying towards a master's degree in the Royal College of Music with professor Kyle Horch.

EMILY BEECH [*Stage director*] is an opera maker and musician, having trained as a singer and drifted more recently to opera directing, focussing on contemporary opera and making community-minded work. She recently completed a Masters in vocal performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance where she was generously supported by a Kathleen Roberts scholarship. She previously read Music at the University of Birmingham, graduating with a first-class degree in 2019. Recent assistant directing credits include *Agrippina* (Hampstead Garden Opera) and *Noye's Fludde* (Pimlico Musical Foundation). As a Waterperry Opera Festival Young Artist, Emily assistant directed their double bill production of *Acis and Galatea* and *Dido and Aeneas* this summer and directed the Young Artist's Gala. As a facilitator, Emily has worked with Streetwise Opera and the Irene Taylor Trust, to create a devised piece of music-theatre for Trinity Laban's Co-Lab Festival 2023.



OLIVIA BELL [*Clara Novello Davies – soprano*] recently graduated as Kathleen Roberts scholar from Trinity Laban Conservatoire, gaining a distinction in her performance master's degree. She won the main award and the audience prize in the Trinity Gold Medal competition. She held a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music as a librettist, in collaboration with the Royal Opera House, and has been awarded a Junior Fellowship from

September. Recent commissions include for the Royal Opera House and Carnegie Hall. She previously read English as senior choral scholar at Queens' College, Cambridge, where she won the Beaumont Award for musical excellence. Last year she was joint recipient of the national Joaninha Award.

Olivia was a young artist at Bury Court Opera, where she premiered *Mad King Suibhne* in conjunction with ENO. Passionate about accessible opera, recent contemporary opera premieres include: *Gretel/Griselda* [*The Hive*, Hoxton Halls]; *King Harald's Saga* [King's Place]; *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* [Momentum Now/Two Moors Festival]; *The Lost One* [A Time of Empty Tales, Tête à Tête].



JACK CAMPBELL [*Repetiteur*] trained as a solo pianist, while his composing led him to think creatively about performance and the audience's experience. He's woven coloured lighting and electronic soundscapes into his piano recitals, and composed a piece with a computerised score for six pianos. A busy collaborative pianist, Jack has worked with many singers and a wind trio. He was music director for *1936: Fishing*, a chamber opera by Robert Ely and Peter Scott-Presland. The opera's world premiere was at Tête-à-tête: The Opera Festival 2022. He's supported by the Marjorie and Dorothy White Trust. The RCM awarded him the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Silver Medal 2022, for his contribution to the college as a collaborative pianist. Jack currently works as an accompanist, teacher, and arts administrator. His next piano recital is on 21 October at St. James's, Bushey.



ROBERT ELY [*Composer*] Lacking formal musical education, Robert was yet able to join the Army as a musician in 1967. He became a Bandmaster after attending the Royal Military School of Music, ending as Senior Bandmaster in the Parachute Regiment. All that ended in 1986 when he was thrown out for being gay. In response he founded Rank Outsiders, for ex-service personnel similarly affected; their campaign resulted in the lifting of the ban on LGBT+ service personnel in 2000.

Outside the army he has maintained a prodigious music output. He was a member of the London Gay Symphony Orchestra for several years, and contributed to, and conducted "Free", an 'anti-requiem' with words by Peter Scott-Presland for World AIDS Day 1998. He won third place at the *Coup de Vents* wind festival in Lille [2015] and second place in a similar festival in Galicia [2018]. For the last five years he has been working on the music for

the seventeen pieces which make up 'A Gay Century', of which fifteen are completed.



LIANNA GIBBS [*Lighting Designer*] recently graduated from the University of Roehampton's BA Dance programme, where she trained in Lighting and Production for Dance and Theatre. She has done lighting tech and stage management for Streatham Space Project, Third Row Dance Company, and the Roehampton University Dance Team. "1944: Home Fires" is her first post-graduation lighting design project.

LOUISA KATARIA [*Alto sax*] graduated from the Royal College of Music [RCM] with a First in 2023, studying saxophone, clarinet and jazz flute. She started young, with a Trinity Associate classical saxophone diploma at age 16. She was a woodwind finalist in the RCM's concerto competition with Villa Lobos' *Fantasia*. She plays regularly in the Aeonix Saxophone Quartet. A versatile musician, Louisa ranges orchestrally from classical to jazz to musical theatre. Highlights include playing Bernstein's *Mass* under Marin Alsop, *West Side Story* under Joana Carneiro, and making her West-End debut for the Scala Radio Christmas Broadcast at the London Palladium. She was recently invited to play lead clarinet with Lewes Big Band on their August Tour. As well her instrumental skills, Louisa is an experienced choral singer, and is excited to be starting a choral scholarship at St Martin-in-the-Fields this Autumn.



ANTHONY STUART LLOYD [*The Warder, Bass*] is from Cardiff and studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. His roles include; Timur [*Turandot*], Bartolo [*Le Nozze di Figaro*], Basilio [*Il Barber di Siviglia*] and Commendatore [*Don Giovanni*] for WNO, The King of Clubs [*The Love for Three Oranges*], Méphistophélès [*Faust*], Selim [*Il Turco in Italia*] and Leporello [*Don Giovanni*] for Theater Freiburg, Chef Greque & Mercure [*Les Troyens*] for Toulouse Capitole

Opera, Timur [*Turandot*] for La Fabrique Opera Grenoble, Brander [*La Damnation de Faust*] for the LSO, Don Magnifico [*La Cenerentola*] for Clonter Opera, Michele [*Il Tabarro*] and Dulcamara [*L'elisir d'amore*] for the Cardiff Festival and Bendigeidfran [*The King of Britain's Daughter*] for the Hay-on-Wye Literature Festival. West End appearances include; Jacob [*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*], [*Howard Keel: The Centennial Celebration*] and The Ghost of Christmas Present in the London Palladium Production of Scrooge - The Musical's UK tour.

ALFRED MITCHELL [*Ivor Novello – tenor*] is currently studying on the Masters programme in Vocal Performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland under Iain Paton. Alongside this, in the 2023/24 season he will be working with the Alexander Gibson Opera Studio as a guest artist. He is incredibly grateful to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Trust for their financial support during his studies. Previously he has performed across the country in principal roles with companies including St. Paul's Opera, North Wales Opera. He made his international debut in Opera Loki's 2022 season. Recently he performed as part of the chorus in the 2023 Longhope Opera Festival. Future plans include portraying Robert the Bruce in the world premiere of *The Bruce* by Rhakhat-Bi Abdysagin touring Scotland in 2024. He is incredibly excited to be making his debut for Homo Promos in such an exciting role alongside such talented colleagues.



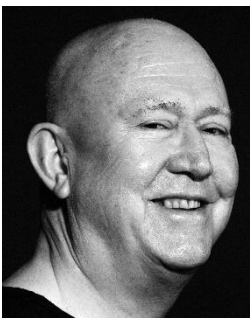
KEVIN MOORE [*Stage Manager*] has been a South London entrepreneur for over thirty years, running clubs, bars and retail businesses; at the height of the AIDS crisis he turned his vending machine network over to supplying, uniquely, condoms with lube sachets to all the gay bars in London; who knows how many lives this saved? He stage-managed the Pride Open Stage 1988 – 1994, seamlessly parading up to 20 top-class bands and singers in eight-hour shows for audiences of over 100,000. In his time, he has also been a professional drummer.

HENRIETTA POOS [*Harp*] path to a musical career led her from the Hochschule für Musik 'Hanns Eisler' in Berlin via Cambridge University to the Royal College of Music in London. Supported by a Doctor Knobel Scholarship and by Mrs I. Bullen she gained an M.Mus. with Distinction, having studied under the tutelage of professors Ieuan Jones and Stephen Fitzpatrick, and regularly participated in masterclasses and lessons from some of the world's most acclaimed harpists. Frequently praised for her exceptional musicality, she i. a. won the RCM Harp competition in 2019 and was also selected for a placement with the BBC Symphony Orchestra's Pathway Scheme. Henriette enjoys all facets of harp music as a soloist, an orchestral, and a chamber musician and has widely performed internationally, with several of her performances recorded or broadcast live. She also has recorded at venues like the Abbey Road Studios and has played more than a dozen world premieres.





KIERAN RAYNER [*Frankie Fraser, baritone*] is a London-based New Zealand baritone and RCMIOS graduate. Engagements include Junius *The Rape of Lucretia* (Royal Opera House); Sorcerer *Dido & Aeneas* (Waterperry Festival Opera); Escamillo *Carmen* (Norwich Into Opera); Gasparo *Rita, Aeneas Dido & Aeneas* (IF Opera); Dancairo *Carmen*, Forester *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Longborough Festival Opera); The Prince *Fantasio* (Garsington Opera); Papageno *Die Zauberflöte* (Festival Opera NZ); Marcello *La Bohème* (Mid Wales Opera); Figaro *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Devon Opera); Eisenstein *Die Fledermaus* (NAFA Singapore); plus concert solos at The Royal Albert Hall and Buckingham Palace. Winner of SING FINZI 2022, International Handel Competition Finalist and Wigmore Hall Song Competition Semifinalist. Previous Young Artist with Britten Pears Arts, Independent Opera, Verbier Festival, Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation, and NZ Opera. As a writer-performer, he created interactive play/recital *Wohin – Where To?* for the Aldeburgh Festival, and won a Samling Arts Residency to develop a sequel.



PETER SCOTT-PRESLAND [*Producer/Librettist*] got involved in theatre at Oxford. His student revue, *Here it Comes*, was nominated for a Critics Award for Best Musical 1974. Moving to Birmingham he took a Fringe First Award in 1977 with his musical *Yesterdaze* [music – David Harrod]. In London he wrote for freesheet *Capital Gay*, while his theatre company Consenting Adults in Public put on original queer work 1980 – 86, including his four Heath plays, performed in the cruising grounds of Hampstead Heath. He co-wrote [with Louise Parker Kelley] and produced the first play in the world about HIV/AIDS; *AntiBody* premiered in October 1983 – at the Cockpit Theatre. His musicals *Dorothy's Travels* [1990/92] and *La Ronde* [2012] were both nominated for awards. He programmed the cabaret tent at Pride 1985 – 97, and has given a performance after every Pride march since 1978. He translates songs from French - particularly the work of the great philosophical surrealist, novelist, playwright and chansonnier Boris Vian.

Performances at:

Cockpit Theatre, Gateforth St, NW8 8EH. Sun 3rd Sept, 8.30pm

HMP Wormwood Scrubs. Tues 5th Sept. PRIVATE PERFORMANCE

Tower Theatre, 16 Northwold St, N16 7HR. Wed 6th Sept, 8.00pm

Tickets for the Tower from here - <https://rebrand.ly/home-fires-6>



JOE TOBIN [*Conductor*] is a prize-winning conductor, composer, singer and musical scholar often found performing among many of the finest young musicians in the country. Music was first introduced to Joe as a chorister of St James the Greater church choir, Leicester. He read music at the University of York and founded Animas, a student chamber choir that continues its leading role in the department today, and was musical director of the most profitable show in the history Drama Society. He proceeded to the world-leading choral conducting course at the Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Patrick Russill. Joe has been a visiting teacher of conducting and general musicianship at the Junior Academy, and has sent students onto leading colleges and conservatoires. He is currently the Musical Director of Newbury Choral Society, Conductor of Peshurst Choral Society, Director of Music at St Thomas of Canterbury church, Brentwood, and Founder and Musical Director of the professional choir, the Lerion Consort.

ABOUT HOMO PROMOS

Homo Promos [HP for short] was formed in response to the notorious Section 28, slipped into a Conservative Local Government Act in 1988. The clause said that local authorities "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

Since many Queer arts organisations had local authority funding and appeared on council premises, this was not only a gratuitous insult but a clear and present threat. By taking the name 'Homo Promos' we wanted to sail into the eye of the storm, challenge councils to ban us, create a cause celebre.

In fact, only one venue, Oval House in Lambeth, threw a wobbly; we got round it by inserting a tiny, hand-written 'not' above the defiant and loud logo, thus highlighting the absurdity of the law. In fact, no-one was ever

prosecuted under Section 28, though the psychological damage it inflicted was enormous.

In the 35 years of our existence, we have presented over twenty productions including *Double Vision* [1988], *Star Turn* [1989], *A Good Ol' Boy* [1989], *Escape from Planet Mary* [1993] with cabaret act Bent Double, Timothy Mason's *Levitation* [1994], the song cycle *Desire* [music - Peter Murphy], based on Edmund White's 'travels in gay America' *States of Desire* [2010], the smash hit *Strip Search* [2012], and *The Keyhole* [2017], a street theatre piece about the last two men to be hanged for sodomy in the UK and performed outside the house where they were arrested.

During lockdown Homo Promos gave Zoom performances every Tuesday throughout the entire period of restrictions, drawing on its and Peter Scott-Presland's extensive archive of Queer work going back to 1974; a total of 50+ plays over 66 weeks. For this spectacular marathon it won the 2021 Award from the International Lesbian and Gay Cultural Network.



ABOUT A GAY CENTURY

For the last seven years Robert and Peter have been working on *A Gay Century*, an epic cycle of Queer life 1900 – 2001. Starting from *Fishing* and working outward, we intended to have a piece for every decade of the century, though we have ended up with seventeen, with possibly three more in the pipeline. We wanted to explore our history, but in a quirky way, highlighting episodes which might have been ignored and exploring themes from odd angles.

The publication of the Wolfenden Report, for example, gives rise to *Separate Beds*, a Rossinian farce about a gay couple trying to disentangle their living arrangements in the face of an imminent police visit. The famous Jeremy Thorpe/Norman Scott scandal and murder attempt is treated from the point

of view of the dogs involved. The main characters are Mrs Tish, a Jack Russell, and Rinka, a Great Dane.

A Gay Century covers themes such as gays in the armed forces, parenthood, AIDS/HIV, the Gay Liberation Front, and the Admiral Duncan bombings.

We agreed early on that these pieces would be chamber operas, aimed at the most flexible and experimental companies, the pop-up operas. None of the works would involve more than seven people, including cast and players.

Two pieces, *1907: The Jewels* and *1983: Quarantine*, challenge the form with multiple doubling of parts, while a couple also require offstage choruses which would probably be pre-recorded. Although each piece is pocket-sized, with all but three being one-act operas, collectively they're longer than the Ring Cycle, with a truly epic ambition. We hope that other companies will take up these works, which can all stand alone or be performed in double bills.

Why operas? Because setting words to music heightens emotion unimaginably; it forces you to distil and compress the words and situations, forces you out of dull naturalism and away from seeing historical characters as the same as us, but in fancy dress. It liberated the imagination in a way that the kitchen sink never does.

ABOUT 1944: HOME FIRES

It's funny how you mishear things when you're only half listening. Once in the early I was wrestling with a newspaper column close to a deadline, with the radio playing in the background. I was startled to hear on the news that fighting had broken out in Debenham's. And it wasn't even the first day of the Sales. The newsreader had, of course, said 'Lebanon', in an item about Israel aggression against its Arab neighbours.

I was reminded of this when, half-listening to Radio 3 while working on the libretto for *Two Queens*, I heard Matthew Sweet talking in a slot called *Time Travellers*, where some quirky little historical morsel with a musical connection is briefly aired by a guest. He was telling the fascinating story of how Ivor Novello, golden boy of British musical theatre of 30s and 40s and the prettiest man in England, was sent to prison for fiddling his petrol coupons during World War II. It almost certainly cost him a knighthood.

At the time no-one was allowed petrol unless they were doing work of national importance. Novello pleaded that he needed his personalised Rolls Royce because he was boosting morale, but to no avail. Enter Grace Constable, a besotted fan, who overheard him at the stage door lamenting that he couldn't motor down to his place in Maidenhead at the weekends – he held regular orgies there. To ingratiate herself with him, Grace suggested that he should lend her firm the car, they would get petrol and use it in the week, and he could get off with it at the weekends. It was a cheeky suggestion from a typist under a false name pretending to be far more important in the company than she was. They knew nothing of it when the fraud was discovered, and Novello had the misfortune to come before a magistrate who hated musicals and homosexuals with an equal passion. As a result he got 28 days in Wormwood Scrubs Prison. The experience almost certainly shortened his life [he died at 58] – as Wilde's prison experience shortened his.

Matthew Sweet said – and I may have misheard this – that he interviewed 'Mad' Frankie Fraser, psychopathic sidekick of the Richardson gang. Charlie and Eddie Richardson ran one of the most violent criminal set-ups in London, second only to the Kray Twins. Pulling nails with pliers and cutting off toes with bolt cutters a speciality. Fraser claimed, according to Sweet, that he briefly shared a cell with Ivor Novello. I nearly fell out of my chair.

And it got better. Again, according to Fraser/Sweet, Novello was very distressed at being in prison, and nervous of meeting the other inmates, but as he was going down to lunch from his cell the first day, all the prisoners lined up and sang *We'll Gather Lilacs* to welcome him. That clinched it. In my mind I heard the humming chorus from *Madama Butterfly*. There had to be an opera in it.

Composer's Note

In 'Home Fires' it would have been all too easy to steal from the maestro, but I have only dipped briefly into some of his enduring music, with the single exception of the prisoner's chorus (Keep the Home Fires Burning).

I chose a harp as part of the instrumental ensemble to give a feel of Ivor's Welsh background and the two saxophones to throw a nod to the era through which he lived (when instruments like the saxophone became quite popular in musical theatre and in live music), although he himself never used one in his orchestration.

FOR TETE A TETE THE OPERA FESTIVAL

Bill Bankes-Smith Programmer, director, master of the operatic universe
Anna Gregg The woman who gets things done
Leo Douulton Press, PR, marketing – the sensitive one
David Salter Tireless technical supremo

FOR TOWER THEATRE

Jess Vollar Bell Technical, Admin, Lord High Everything Else



In rehearsal at the Old Diorama