

The Joy Of Opera

27th & 28th September 2025, Cockpit Theatre

*Part of Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival 2025
Produced by Tête à Tête*

Tête à Tête
THE OPERA FESTIVAL 2025

Introduction

There are two ways to use this programme.

The first is the normal way, reading the events taking place in chronological order. You're looking for the pages with titles like this one's.

The second is as a choose-your-own-narrative exploration, in which you'll become a bewildered adventurer at a strange celebration. It's a little bit more joyous than just browsing, and will include the pages with **TITLES LIKE THIS**.

The choice, adventurer (or not) is yours...

READ NORMALLY (*Go to page 3*)

GO ON AN ADVENTURE (*Go to page 5*)

About The Event

You are warmly invited to come and rediscover the joy you first found in opera at two days of playful activities designed to rekindle your spark.

The Joy of Opera is a chance for anybody who has experienced the visceral magic of the art form, whether creator, performer, backstage, front of house, admin or audience, to join with like minds in a magical, non-hierarchical, safe space. Here, through practical sessions rather than debate, we can share our enthusiasm, skills and knowledge in a playful yet positive and constructive manner, getting to know each other too along the way.

When you arrive, you will be given a certain number of magic beans. Over the next two days - or however long you are there - you can then spend these to buy your way into certain groups, or take part in other activities which can earn you magic beans. At the end, we will tot up everyone's savings and then - well, wait and see!

Sessions will most probably be added, removed, and changed, so do keep an eye on our website if you want to keep track.

Or just turn up and dive in!

We look forward to seeing you there - whether at the very first welcome, or the very last closing circle (**Page 36**).

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PAGE 5: START

You are bold, adventurer.

You have heard of this opera, and it gives you no joy.

You have never felt joy - or any other emotion - in your life.

*You are businesslike. Strong. And it sickens you to see this foolish celebration of 'opera' taking place.**

You've come here with one simple, achievable goal.

To win opera. As the revellers move past you, what do you do?

STRIDE DEFIANTLY (Go to page 6)

OBSERVE QUIETLY (Go to page 7)

**You may imagine this taking place at The Cockpit, Marylebone, 27th-28th September 2025.*



PAGE 6: THE CELEBRATION

You stride defiantly into the celebration.

Already, you can sense dissent among the revellers. Perhaps they have come here to plot some terrible revolution, mouths twitching upwards to bare their teeth.

You see some of these radicals gathered in a side-chamber.

Do you AVOID them or FACE THEM DEFIANTLY?

AVOID (Go to page 13)

FACE THEM DEFIANTLY (Go to page 11)



PAGE 7: PEOPLE-WATCHING

You sit watching people wander by.

Some of them have a glint in their eyes, like a dog with a large stick, yet none of them are either dogs or carrying large sticks.

Some are carrying crowns, dice, and pot plants. Perhaps some sort of eco-monarchist gambling ring is taking place here.

You don't understand. What do you do?

EXPLORE (Go to page 27)

OBSERVE MORE (Go to page 34)



Escape Room Opera

11:15-13:30, Saturday

These people are trapped but they seem... happy to be here?

They assume you are one of them, ignoring the open door. Instead, they explain why they have these words, why they are making these noises.

There is an obvious solution to the puzzle, of course, and you are strong enough to see it.

Soon, you too are trapped in the room with them.

“Come and create an opera by doing an escape room! First trialled at the Newcastle leg of the Festival, build story, music, and words as you try and get out of our very own Tim Burke’s clutches.”



In time, you open the door. You could stay here, or stagger back to the light and plan for how to overcome opera better next time. (Go to page 29)

COMMIT

14:30-15:45, Saturday & Sunday

You stride, emotionless as ever, to the scheming huddle.

You are taken aback by how warmly they greet you.

How carefully they listen to your own tales of defiance, and encourage you to share more.

Perhaps, you have found your place.

“Bring your ideas for opera concerned with current or historical politics and we’ll talk about how to turn big ideas into powerful stories, with Irum Fazal.”



Or after a while, when someone suggests going out into the gardens, you go with them.

After all, there’s more room for striding there. (Go to page 35)

Sebastian AI

14:30-15:45, Saturday & Sunday

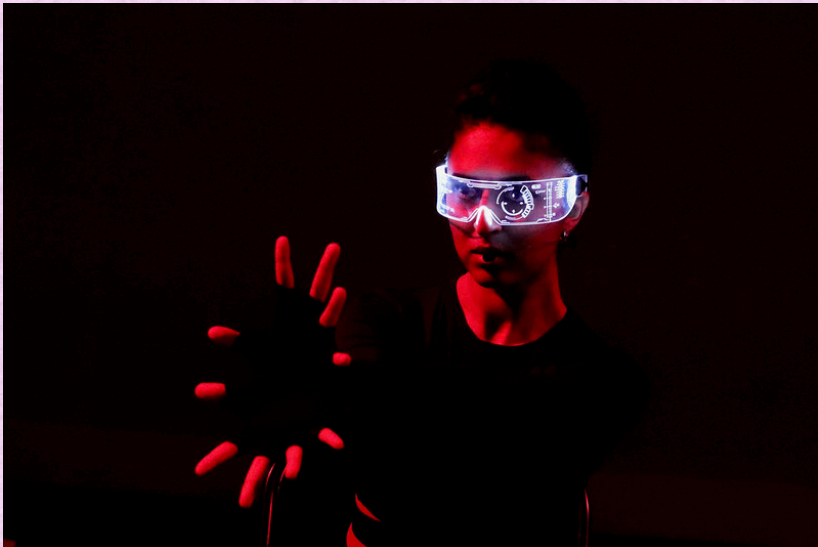
It beeps.

It flickers.

You're fairly confident it's responding to what you're saying, though you also used to believe that about your father.

It's very shiny.

“A chance to meet, interact and improvise with an operatic AI brought to us all the way from Egypt by composer Bahaa al Ansary.”



You're ready. You can stay here admiring it, or start the expedition anew. (Go to page 5)

PAGE 11: THE REVOLUTIONARIES

You rush towards the side chamber.

Many of the radicals seem to be singing, building barricades, and hyping themselves up.

Others gather furtively; perhaps leaders, sharing war stories and secret schemes.

Who do you face first?

FACE THE SCHEMERS (Go to page 9)

FACE THE SINGERS (Go to page 24)



Paint Your Opera

14:30-15:45, Saturday

You wander deeper into the caves.

You see some people, sat in the dark, with brushes and paints.

On the walls, there is an image you almost recognise. You think you might have seen it on a stage once.

You take a quiet moment, here in the dark, to remember.

“Come and paint your opera with Helen Epega, creator of the glorious painted operas *Song Queen: A Pidgin Opera* and *Of Earth and Quill*.”



You did not feel an emotion. You certainly did not feel a sense of oneness with humanity. No, you are now ready to properly observe these strange revellers. Joylessly, of course. (Go to page 13)

PAGE 13: SNEAKING

You sneak past the terrifyingly merry attendees.

But there's a disquieting feeling inside. You almost feel content.

If you're going to avoid this infectious delight, you're going to need to settle yourself.

You can see a flash of green outside. Maybe sweating it out in the gardens is what you need?

Or maybe you need to dominate the world with rational thought?

Go GARDENING (Go to page 35)

Go THINKING (Go to page 33)



Look Your Best In Photos

16:00-17:15, Saturday

You burst through the window, glass shattering over the street below.

You rise up, jaw firm, sunlight glinting off the shards to banish the shadows under your chin.

You look upwards to stop blood dripping in your eye.

“Amazing! Hold it there!” a photographer cries.

“Tête à Tête’s photos appear in the press and all over the socials, and we also make them available for your personal promotional use free of charge. In this session our production photographer Claire runs through tips on how to make the most of the production photographer being there!”



After a while, she persuades you that there’s people inside who need to see your magnificence. (Go to page 16)

PAGE 15: DARKNESS

You descend into the dark.

The tunnel slopes downwards, bringing to mind memories of ancient cave-people emotionlessly fighting leopards. You would have been a good cave-person.

But here, there is a door. Behind it, you can hear being screaming to be let out, uttering nonsense combinations of words.

Perhaps you would understand this place if you open the door.

OPEN THE DOOR (Go to page 8)

KEEP GOING DOWN (Go to page 12)



PAGE 16: RAINBOWS

You stride powerfully into the room.

It is filled with ghastly colours, without a trace of grey to be seen. Some of the people even move their bodies in coordination with nearby music. And one even... offers you a... hug.

Something Must Be Done.

You can see clothes scattered across the floor, and you can see an empty space some of them are looking at expectantly. What do you do?

DRESS TO IMPRESS (Go to page 21)

PERFORM TO INFORM (Go to page 23)



POTTERING

16:00-17:15, Saturday & Sunday

You join the discussion.

It takes a little while, but eventually you shudder and realise that some of these people garden for... pleasure.

You have only ever gardened to show your dominance over the inferior green species.

But now you're wondering...

“Come and share your stories of being in gardens: treehouses, mud pies, French cricket, easter eggs, greenhouses, autumn leaves, flower pots, blackberries and snails as research for a new garden opera, with Irum Fazal.”



You come to your senses, having dug a very deep irrigation ditch. You can stay here, or descend. (Go to page 15)

PAGE 18: READY OR NOT

Yes. You are mighty.

You've never needed to talk to someone. Anything worth talking about is already self-evident, like the superiority of the bassoon.

If only these people could see! Then they would understand.

You can hear the sounds of 'happiness' coming from a nearby room. If you are ready, you could go there and flaunt yourself now.

Or maybe you need to eat something first.

FLAUNT (Go to page 16)

EAT (Go to page 30)



ALLSING

11:15-13:30, Auditorium

YES.

VICTORY.

DOMINANCE.

Here, you can show everyone your superiority. From here, you can conquer the operatic world!

“A fantastical simulation of the opera industry led by our very own Leo Doulton, pioneer of immersive opera. Play as the Imperial Opera House, Ratfaced Opera, The Painbury Foundation, and more, experiencing what it’s like to be making the decisions.”



Eventually, someone suggests that you may have misunderstood the spirit of the event. (Go to Page 3)

PAGE 20: VICTORY OR DOLLS

You know what's important.

You need to win opera.

And then... there it is. Maps, diagrams, data-sheets, all just... left there, for anyone to play with!

This is your chance! To dominate! Triumph! Win!

*Daddy will finally love you, if only either of you could understand the emotion of love!**

At which point, a woman taps you on the elbow.

"If you wanted to, you could stop. Come and give a heart to a doll. Achieve your dreams."

What do you do?

WIN (Go to page 19)

OTHER (Go to page 26)



**You once looked it up in the dictionary together, and agreed to never speak of that embarrassing incomprehension again.*

All Articles Abandoned

11:15-13:30, Sunday

You seize clothes from the box.

You dress the way people should dress.

They... applaud? They like what you're wearing? Someone even tells you you look magnificent.

You know you look magnificent, but this is the first time somebody's said it. Maybe there are some decent people here...

“Posit: Opera is a form that invites and democratises drag, gives authority to gender options, and which allows for layered identity.”



You feel empowered. It is time to face the real trouble-makers in the building, loudly celebrating nearby. (Go to page 6)

Opera Therapy

12:30-13:30, Sunday

You enter the temple.

The voice encourages you to sit down and talk about your concerns.

You feel... safe. Almost relaxed. Your jaw unclenches for the first time since Blair, and you start to talk about your plan to win opera.

You even answer when the voice asks why you want to.

“Drop in for a one-to-one session to talk about all your hopes, worries, and unspoken thoughts about your life in opera - all with an expert opera maker.”



You feel... better about yourself. Not that you felt unhappy, or any other emotion. Of course not! You might lie here for a while, or go out into the world. (Go to page 32)

Everybody's Queer

14:30-16:00, Sunday

You stand there in a proper pose.

You talk to the assembled people.

One of them makes a suggestion for how you could get your 'you' across even better.

It is a good idea. You ask for some more tips. And when someone asks for your advice, you happily give it.

“Join composer-performer Guy Harries to unleash your queerness. Create text, sound, movement, characters, and maybe a new opera? All welcome, everybody's queer!”



There's just... something about some of these people. A sense of defiance. When they've finished with your instructive comments (and a few of their own), you follow them towards a special celebration they've mentioned. (Go to page 6)

Choir For The End Of The World

16:15-17:30, Sunday

You start charging at the barricade just as the singers start a new tune.

It's... defiant. It's proud. It cares about the world you're here to defend.

Oh no. You're... you think you might be feeling an emotion.

You start joining in the singing.

“Join musician and composer Bob Allan for an interactive workshop on singing, eco-grief, and resistance!”



Suddenly, you come to your senses. You need to show these people who you are.

One of them mentioned a place to do just that. (Go to page 16)

PAGE 25: ABOVE

You stand high above the celebration, looking down. You were already looking down on the celebration, of course, but now you are doing so even more.

There is a small temple here, and inside, you can hear gentle murmurs.

One of the party-goers leaves the softly-furnished temple, and a voice calls out:

“If you’d like to talk to someone, the door is open.”

GO INSIDE (Go to page 22)

BE STRONGER ALONE (Go to page 18)



Dreams & A Heart

All day, Saturday/Sunday, foyer

You sit down.

You talk about your dreams.

You give a heart to a doll, realising how gently you can place stuffing inside it.

“Contribute to Regina Mendes’ visionary Dreams and a Heart arts project by meditating dreams into the heart of one of many tiny dolls.”



You realise that this must be a nightmare. Do you stay sleeping, or WAKE UP to reality? (Go to page 5)

PAGE 27: UP AND DOWN

You start exploring the celebration.

There's almost too much to take in, and you do not take any of it. You are already magnificent and complete.

However, you do see a dark tunnel leading downwards, and you think that something might be up with that.

You also notice some sort of temple above you, and you cannot let them drag standards down.

GO DOWN (Go to page 15)

GO UP (Go to page 25)



PR Surgery

All day, Saturday/Sunday, foyer

You tell the world.

You find the best PR agency you can, and they spin your dry, straightforward style into a tale that grabs the hearts of the nation.

People flock to you, eager to hear what you plan to do.

“Wildkat PR, who run press for Tête à Tête, are offering drop in sessions on getting press for your shows - ten minutes each!”



In time, you're ready to try again. This time, you're going to win opera. (Go to page 5)

PAGE 29: PRESERVATIVES

You are an adventurer in a pickle.

Not a pickle. You're too competent to be in a pickle. You relish being in a pickle, and anyway, this is more of a jam.

You're going to have to restart the expedition with a new approach.

But what will that approach be? Overcome it with the latest in gadgetry, or a good old-fashioned press campaign to win funders over?

TECH (Go to page 10)

PRESS (Go to page 28)



Cookbook

All day, Saturday/Sunday

You eat.

You yield to hunger.

You realise that many other people share this need, and share optimal meals with one another.

You feel a sense of affinity with them.

“Lots of opera workers batch-cook before a busy period. Let’s share our best recipes!”



Fortified, you start your expedition again. (Go to page 5)

The Hildegard von Bingen Society For Gardening Companions Suggestion Box

All day, Saturday/Sunday

You start to write your secrets. You feed them into an open mouth in the rocks, which devours them hungrily.

It speaks to you of an ancient society of gardeners, monastics, and writers. Of which you are now a part. You've never been a part of something before. You start to dream...

“The Society transplants, re-roots, and propagates a queer, feminist gardening society founded by 12th century mystic and musician Hildegard von Bingen. Now they are asking for your contributions.”



You must have sleepwalked high above the party. You can stay with your companions, or climb. (Go to page 25)

PAGE 32: MIRRORS

You catch a glimpse of your reflection in a window.

You don't feel emotions, but you can rationally appreciate how damn perfect you are.

The world out there... it needs to know.

But these people here... they need to be shown the right way to appreciate, not enjoy, opera.

Do you TELL THE WORLD? (Go to page 14)

Do you STICK WITH THE MISSION? (Go to page 20)



PAGE 33: SELF-REFLECTION

You sit and think.

Clench every muscle in your brain and buttocks. Think!

What do you need to do?

How can you triumph over this nauseating celebration and remind everyone of how doomed they are?

KEEP GOING, YOU'RE GREAT (Go to page 32)

MAKE A NEW PLAN (Go to page 29)



Jigsaw & Bar

All day, Saturday/Sunday

You start to observe in a more tactile manner.

You realise that some of the bits of cardboard in front of you fit together.

You accept the offer of a refreshing drink.

You become just like them.

“There’ll be a jigsaw in the foyer. There’s also a bar. Both are pretty self-explanatory!”



No. This will not stand. You can hear the sounds of radical joy in a side-room. Someone has to stop this. (Go to page 11)

PAGE 35: HORTICULTURE

You stand in a beautiful garden.

It's not real. You know that. It's an imaginary garden.

Everyone here's just playing pretend.

Some of them seem to be discussing gardening. You're sure you could teach them a thing or seven.

While over there is a book. Maybe you should just write down your secrets...

TALK (Go to page 17)

WRITE (Go to page 31)



Closing Circle

18:00-19:30, Sunday

We shall gather here to share our final thoughts, and share some of what we've made.

Thank you for coming to *The Joy Of Opera!*

