

MELANIA THE OPERA

by

Jeremy Limb

&

Melinda Hughes



SYNOPSIS

The year is 2027 and Trump is in the third year of his second term. Melania is due to arrive at an Elementary School in Rastro Mofeta, Florida to deliver a speech für her anti-bullying campaign. News breaks that Russia — having already annexed Ukraine and Romania — is invading Slovenia, her homeland. Trump dismisses it as “not America’s problem.” This statement triggers a moral crisis for Melania: should she remain loyal to Trump, or finally defy her bully-in-chief husband for the sake of humanity?

CAST

Melania - Melinda Hughes

Melania’s PA - Phil Clieve

School Principal - Louise Innes

Reporter- Meighread Dandeneau

Bodyguard- Nathan Richards

CREATIVES

Director - Daniel Slater

Music Director - Guy Murgatroyd

Composer: Jeremy Limb (additional music by Melinda Hughes)

Libretto: Melinda Hughes & Jeremy Limb (additional lyrics by Rich Hall)

Choreographer – Tim Claydon

Designer - Carly Brownbridge

Stage Manager: Sarah O Neil

Makeup: Philippa Louise

Accent coaches: Gabriella Santinelli & Meighread Dandeneau

Slovenian coach: Ajda Porenta

Violin: Felicity Broome-Skelton

Double Bass: Robert Rickenberg

BIOGRAPHIES



Melinda Hughes - Melania & Co-writer.

Melinda graduated with honours from the Maastricht Conservatory of Music, then continued her studies at The Royal College of Music and The Brussels Opera Studio. She toured Europe for five years as a soloist with André Rieu. Operatic roles performed include *Aida* (Dorset), *Tosca*, *the Countess*, *Madama Butterfly* (CAMI, Diva & Longborough), *Mimi* (Diva & ECO), *Fiordiligi* (Opera interludes), *Violetta* (ECO), *Gilda* (ECO), *Micaela*, *Frasquita*, *Konstanze* (BYO), *Donna Anna* (Pavilion), *Pamina*, *Euridice*, *Frau Fluth*, *Nedda & Marzelline*. On the concert platform she has sung Elijah (Salisbury Cathedral), Britten's War Requiem (Norwich Cathedral), Euryanthe (Cadogan Hall), Midsummer night's dream (Auditorio Nacional Madrid) & The Messiah (Sheldonian & Mezquita Cordoba). Melinda is a specialist in Weimar Cabaret and has released two CDs '*Smoke & Noise*' and '*Weimar & Back*' (Nimbus). She won critical acclaim at the 2018 Edinburgh Fringe for *MARGO. Half woman, half beast* about the Berlin Cabaret star Margo Lion. She is the Artistic Director of the *Allstars Festival* Barbados, teaching and mentoring young Barbadian opera singers. She appears regularly on the London comedy circuit as her operatic alter ego *Clemeniza Von Trunksale* performing for the President of Barbados, The Lord Mayor of London at Mansion House, Inner Temple, The Alternative Comedy Memorial Society and The Cotton House, Mustique. She has written for Spears and the Spectator.



Philip Clieve – Melania's PA

Phil Clieve is a British tenor from Lancashire. He completed his master's degree at the Royal Northern College of Music and is a graduate of the National Opera Studio. Philip has performed with many of the country's foremost opera companies, including Opera North, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Grange Park Opera, Longborough Festival Opera, and Buxton Opera. Recent highlights include Sherryar in Grange Park Opera's *Taj Mahal*, Monostatos in Wild Arts' *The Magic Flute*, and cover tenor soloist in Opera North's acclaimed children's production *Big Opera Adventure*. A committed interpreter of Wagner, Philip was a finalist in the Mastersingers' "Carole Rees" Prize for promising Wagnerian singers. He has sung Augustin Moser and covered David in Saffron Opera Group's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and in 2025 returned to the company to cover both Steuermann and Erik in *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Equally at home on the concert platform, Philip possesses an extensive oratorio repertoire ranging from Smythe to Mendelssohn. His artistry, communicative warmth, and technical assurance continue to establish him as one of the most versatile young tenors of his generation.



Louise Innes The Principal

Louise made her Covent Garden debut singing Mercedes Carmen and she returned there to sing Javotte in a production of Massenet's Manon touring to Japan and La Scala, Milan. She has sung the role of Mercedes with Sir John Eliot Gardiner (Opera Comique), and the title roles in Carmen (Opera North) and Gluck Orfeo (Scottish Opera), Sesto La Clemenza di Tito (Opera North), Annina La Traviata at West Green House and Sofia Risurrezione and Hua-Qui L'Oracolo at Wexford Opera Festival. In oratorio her performances include Messiah in Barcelona (O.A.E), Beethoven Mass in C at the St Magnus Festival, Duruflé Requiem with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Rossini Petite Messe

Solennelle with the Dunedin Consort, Mendelssohn Elijah in York Minster and Verdi Requiem in Ripon Cathedral, Bach Magnificat with the Northern Sinfonia at The Sage, Gateshead, Elgar Music Makers and Brahms Alto Rhapsody in Sherborne Abbey and Bach St Matthew Passion and Juno (Semele) at The London Handel Festival under Laurence Cummings. Louise regularly appears in Cabaret venues across the country with Charlie Bicknell and has developed a passion for singing in different styles. Louise teaches singing at Wells Cathedral School.



Meighread Dandeneau – News reporter

Meighread is an actor, singer, and producer from MA, USA. Stage highlights include The Lesbians of Forest Gate (Canal Cafe Theatre), Peter Pan (Neverland Theatre), Mary Lamb (Hoxton Hall), Cymbeline (Bridewell Theatre), and Puss in Boots (Corbett Theatre). Screen work includes the short film Balls (Omniarch). Her self-produced cabaret - Brick by Brick: songs for building a home in the life that you chose - premiered at The Bread & Roses in August. Meighread has coached voice & dialect on productions including My Name is Rachel Corrie

(Etcetera Theatre), Scenes with girls (Golden Goose Theatre), Mrs. Claus' List (Blue Elephant Theatre), and Three Wise Monkeys (Corbett Theatre). Producing credits include Polar Bears (The White Bear), Violence and Son (Fricative Theatre). Meighread has an MFA in acting from East 15 Acting School, London.



Nathan Richards – Bodyguard

Barbadian tenor Nathan Richards has an associate degree in Music from the Barbados Community College. He has performed as a soloist with many choral societies in Barbados and has sung for The Canadian High Commission, The Royal Commonwealth Society, CARIFESTA, Barbados' 50th National Independence celebration and at the British High Commission for King Charles' birthday. He is a regular soloist at the Allstars Festival and recently sang chorus and cover Puppet & Lover in

Ethel Smyth's Fête Galante with Pegasus Opera at The Britten Theatre, London.



Daniel Slater Director

Daniel Slater is internationally recognised as one of today's leading opera directors. He has directed over 80 productions for 40 companies in 20 countries on 4 continents. His first production, *The Bartered Bride* for Opera North, was nominated for the Outstanding Achievement in Opera award and travelled to France, Spain and New Zealand. Recent awards including Production of the Year for *Tannhäuser* and Best New Opera Production for *The Cunning Little Vixen*. Other opera productions include *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Dido & Aeneas*, *Tamerlano*, *Belshazzar* (Grange Festival); *Nabucco* (Antwerp); *Lohengrin* (San Francisco, Houston, Geneva); *Entführung*, *Don Giovanni*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Cenerentola*, *Gazza Ladra* (Garsington); *Tristan und Isolde* and *Manon Lescaut* (Norwegian National Opera); *Aida*, *Eugene Onegin* (Holland Park); *Traviata* (Houston); *Salome*, *Wozzeck* (Santa Fe); *Peter Grimes* (Geneva); *Xerxes* (Stockholm), *L'Arbore di Diana* (Valencia); *Samson* (Buxton); *Rigoletto*, *Falstaff*, *Fortunio* (Grange Park); *Betrothal in a Monastery* (Glyndebourne); *Manon* (Opera North); *Maometto Secondo* (Strasbourg); *Elixir of Love* (Opera North, WNO, Houston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, San Francisco); *Cunning Little Vixen* (Bregenz, San Francisco, Geneva); *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Der Vogelhandler* (Berlin). Daniel has directed productions for numerous theatre companies, including the Singapore Repertory Theatre, Scarborough, Salisbury, Basingstoke Haymarket, Soho Theatre Company and the National Theatre Studio.



Guy Murgatroyd – Musical Director

Praised for his virtuosity and inquisitive programming, British pianist Guy Murgatroyd is a freelance concert pianist with a passion for Art Song, Lieder, and opera. Alongside solo concert work, he is active as a conductor, répétiteur, musical director, and coach. Commencing piano studies aged eleven, Guy earned a scholarship to the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, studying with Victor Sangiorgio and Pascal Nemirowski. During this time he won every major accompaniment award and received numerous academic honours. Postgraduate studies followed at the Royal Academy of Music with Michael Dussek, where he earned a Master of Arts and DipRAM and won further accolades as a collaborative pianist. He later continued his studies with renowned pedagogue Nina Rautio. Guy has performed at Wigmore Hall, the Purcell Room, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and Oxford's Holywell Music Room, including appearances at the Oxford International Song Festival. He is Musical Director of Rogue Opera, GQ's 2020 award-winning company, arranging and musically directing innovative productions like *Carmen Re-imagined* and *Così Re-imagined*. The company also delivers bespoke events for clients like Fullers, LGT, and Brasserie Blanc. In 2025, Guy has also been working as MD on Ledwell productions run of Neal Hampton and Jeffrey Haddow's *Sense and Sensibility the Musical* receiving four star reviews.



Tim Claydon Director/Choreographer

Tim trained in classical dance and has worked as a ballet dancer and trapeze artist for 20 years. Choreography/ Movement direction includes: *Turandot* (Geneva, Tokyo); *Un ballo in maschera* (Oslo, Copenhagen); *Asrael* (Bonn); *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Effigies of Wickedness* (The Gate); *The Phoenix*, *La traviata*, *Don Carlos* (Houston Grand Opera); *Parsifal* (Chicago Lyric, Houston Grand Opera); *Pyramus and Thisbe*, *Faust* (Canadian Opera); *L'elisir d'amore* (Pittsburgh Opera, Opera North, Opera Oviedo, Chicago Lyric, Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera); *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen* (Vlaamse Opera); *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Malmö Opera); *Belshazzar*, *Orfeo ed Euridice/Dido and Aeneas* (Grange Festival); *Manon Lescaut* (Opera Holland Park); *The Magic Flute*, *Idomeneo*, *Così fan tutte*, *La Comte Ory*, *Falstaff* and *Giorno di Regno* (Garsington Opera). *La Cenerentola* (Bregenz Festspiele) For Opera North: *Peter Grimes*, *Rusalka*, *The Merry Widow*, *La clemenza di Tito*, *Albert Herring*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Andrea Chénier*, *The Little Greats* season, *The Greek Passion* and *Aleko*. His own work includes *In Search of Youkali*, a collection of Kurt Weill songs. Directed *Così Fan Tutte* for the Vienna Opera Academy. Choreographing *I Puritani* at the Metropolitan Opera Dec 2025.



Jeremy Limb - Composer & co-writer

Jeremy read music at Queen's College, Oxford then spent three years at the Royal College of Music where he won the 1993 Millicent Silver Brahms Prize and the 1995 Frank Merrick British Music Prize. He has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 (Young Artist's Forum concert series), given recitals at venues such as St James's Piccadilly and St Martin-in-the-Fields. In 1997 he won first prize in the Robert William and Florence Amy Brant National Piano Competition. He works as a free-lance soloist, accompanist, répétiteur, a jazz/pop performer/arranger and as a musical director. He also writes and performs comedy, appearing regularly at the Pleasance (Edinburgh Fringe), he has had his material used on BBC 1 by Harry Enfield. He was nominated for the LWT New Comedy Writing Award 1998 for his play *Play Wisty for Me - The Life of Peter Cook* (UK tour and Melbourne Comedy Festival 2002.) Jeremy has recorded for the Naxos & Nimbus labels.

As an actor Jeremy has appeared in *The Death of Stalin*, *Ghosts*, *Walliams and Friend* and *Miranda*. He is also in the latest series of *Doctor Who*. He has written and performed with Melinda for twenty years. They have done many Edinburgh seasons together and collaborated on *Margo half Woman, half beast* (directed by Sarah Sigal) for JW3. They are best known for their satirical comedy performing at The Hay Festival, Al Bustan Festival Lebanon, Lerici Festival, Holders Festival Barbados as well as frequent appearances on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4 (with Barry Humphries). They are regulars at The Crazy Coqs in Zedel, Piccadilly and The Cotton House Mustique.



Rich Hall (additional lyrics)

Rich Hall is an American comedian, writer, director, actor, and musician, first coming to prominence as a sketch comedian in the 1980s. He wrote and performed for a range of American networks, in series such as *Fridays*, *Not Necessarily the News* (popularising the "sniglet" neologism), and *Saturday Night Live*. He won the Perrier Comedy Award in 2000, using the character of Tennessee country musician Otis Lee Crenshaw. He has appeared on *QI* and *Have I got News for You*. He has created

and starred in several series for the BBC, including comedies with Mike Wilmot and documentaries often concerning cinema of the United States.

Carly Brownbridge - Designer

Carly is a set and costume designer. She trained at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and won the John Elvery Prize for Stage Design 2020. Carly has also been nominated for a Stage Debut Award and an Offie for best Set and Costume Design. Theatre credits include: *That Bastard Puccini!* (Park Theatre); *King of Pangea* (Kings Head Theatre); *The Wedding Singer* (Urdang); *Most Precious of Goods* (Marylebone Theatre); *Happiest Man on Earth* (Southwark Playhouse); *Spring Awakening* (Urdang); *Agatha* (Theatre 503); *House of Flamenka* (Peacock Theatre); *Glory Ride* (Charring Cross Theatre); *Grenfell: System Failure* (Playground, Tabernacle and Marylebone); *Flashdance* (Urdang); *The Parent Show* (Theatre Royal Plymouth); *Grenfell: Value Engineering* (Tabernacle); *Red Light Winter* (Turbine); *Snow White* (Theatre 503); *Telethon* (Touring); *A Right Royal Rumpus* (Eastbourne Theatres); *La Traviata* (Festival Eva Ganizate); and *If Not Now, When?* (Touring), *Cece's Speakeasy* (The Albany); *North of Providence and Dolores* (Site Specific Live Broadcast); *The Laramie Project* (Bristol Old Vic).

Gaby Santinelli – Accent Coach

Gaby is an Olivier Award winning singer-actress (Jerry Springer The Opera). She played Carlotta Phantom of the Opera (UK National Company), Phyllis Iolanthe (Savoy), Blondchen Die Entführung aus dem Serail (BYO), Jenny Company (Derby Playhouse), and acted alongside Colin Firth in *A Summer In Genoa* and toured for two years in Robert Wilson & Tom Waits' *The Black Rider*. Gaby lives in Los Angeles, where she sang on *LA LA Land*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Godzilla*, *Oblivion*, and *Mulan*, and has performed live at Walt Disney Concert Hall and Hollywood Bowl. She teaches acting at the Performance Faculty at University of Southern California's School of Dramatic Arts and coaches actors for TV Shows and Oscar Winning films (*Skin*, 2019). She has written several screenplays which in development.

Thank you to Andy Street, Bill Bankes Jones & The Tete a Tete team,
The Cockpit & The Chelsea Theatre.

*'No talk of trials, no orange jokes, no Epstein files and most important: nothing f***ing woke!'*



When Trump first took office in 2016 and Melania was thrust into the spotlight, she caught everyone's attention. Elusive and steely, she broke convention as The First Lady, causing speculation and controversy. Inevitably, she became the perfect subject for gossip and satire. I introduced 'Melania's Diary' into my shows. This was followed by the song *Melania's Lament*, where she fantasises about killing her husband in increasingly imaginative ways. My skit caught the

attention of an old colleague, Bill Bankes-Jones. One night, after yet another round of "But what if Melania were a whole opera?" from Bill, I finally gave in.

'Nobody gets what they actually wanted, this is known as the art of the deal'

I believe comedy is a great route to finding new opera audiences. Having lost much of its mainstream exposure years ago, opera is struggling under the public perception of being 'elitist'. The barriers of foreign languages, ticket prices, unfamiliar music are surmountable. Popular operas are bursting with great tunes, tickets are often cheaper than a West End musical and subtitles have made foreign librettos accessible to all.



'Thoughts and prayers, drain the swamp, four more years, lock her up!'



Drawing inspiration from Weimar cabaret composers, I collaborated with my long-time writing partner Jeremy Limb, whose talent has brought magic to countless projects, including our 2018 Edinburgh hit '*Margo, half woman, half beast*' (directed by Sarah Sigal). The success of *Margo*, together with Sarah's support gave me confidence to finally accept Bill's challenge. Jeremy has woven the Slovenian folk song

'Zrejlo je ito' in with 'Hail to the Chief' as well as and country rock (predominant in the MAGA 'Just three words' chant.) The P.A.'s false, dissembling character inspired a more shifting, unstable tonality in contrast to the Principal's, whose music is predominantly more lyrical.

'Cruel, selfish people are the people who succeed'

Satire has always thrived in times of turmoil, and opera has often been a vehicle for political messages, be it questioning aristocracy in *The Marriage of Figaro*, or symbolising the struggle for Italian Independence in Nabucco's 'Va Pensiero'. The recent renaming of The Kennedy Centre and the ban on diversity-linked performances means the timing of *Melania* could not be more relevant.



"Tito took no shit from Stalin, I won't take no shit from Putin"



This is the Melania we secretly want her to be. Having read her -painfully ghostwritten- autobiography, one thing that struck me was her stable and loving childhood. Melania's father worked as a chauffeur and car salesman, her mother as a dress designer. Melania is by all accounts, educated and worldly. Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia) was a communist country under Tito's rule. This is where I feel her reverence for power and authority stems from.

'Enough of the secrets, enough of the spies. Enough of the bullies, enough of the lies'

As culture wars intensify and global conflicts continue to rage, our role as artists is to keep creating. *Melania the Opera* is a tribute to everyone who helps redefine what opera can be. If just one first-time audience goer leaves *Melania* eager to see another opera, I will consider my mission accomplished. My heartfelt thanks to the amazing team who have made this project possible.

Melinda Hughes



Come and see Melinda & Jeremy's Satirical show

Tuesday 4 November, 7pm

**Crazy Coqs
Zedel
20 Sherwood Street
London, W1F 7ED**



Scan me!