



**MAHOGANY OPERA**

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**Last updated: 8 May 2019**

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **CONTEXT**

We make this plan after a period of considerable change for the company, with a renewed and focused sense of purpose, united more than ever around the direction ahead and with extensive knowledge and understanding of the industry and how our work can best manifest itself. We created this plan after a consultation process with Con Brio Ltd, using our rich evaluative models that we've developed with Annabel Jackson Associates and with support and scrutiny from our board and various colleagues.

This plan has been built around our key strengths and opportunities and aims to mitigate the risks facing the organisation. It also aims to address certain fundamental needs within the sector; the chronic lack of music and theatre provision in primary schools, the need for more diverse voices and influences in opera, the need for more performance opportunities around the UK for contemporary music theatre and the lack of support for artists to develop unconventional modes of practice.

We have a distinct and important voice in the UK opera sector. There is no other company in the UK with a comparable international track record which specialises in creating new work, combined with education, talent development and regional touring.

The company is led by Artistic Director, Frederic Wake-Walker. We hope to capitalise on his burgeoning international freelance career, while giving him the chance to do some of his most exciting work with us. We have recently appointed Allison Rosser as Executive Manager. Having worked with us since 2009, she brings extensive expertise of the company and the sector, a unique passion and talent for producing new opera and vital continuity to the company.

Having focused and consolidated our work into three distinct strands and undertaken a highly successful rebrand, we are now in an excellent position to articulate our work to partners and funders. We have maintained a small and dedicated board during the last few months of change but we now have the opportunity to development the board and consequently increase our capacity for generating both earned and contributed income.

In April 2018, we stepped away from being an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation. This has reduced the pressures and risks of touring work regionally in England and given us more time-flexibility with the development of projects. There is however an increased risk of failure to raise enough unrestricted income to cover our core costs. Projects will contribute only a certain amount towards core (approx. 40%) but relying on projects only shifts the risk rather than reducing it. How we cover our core costs is the most important issue that this plan aims to address.

As a company without its own venue, our reliance on partners represents another risk to the company. We have a number of key long-held and nascent relationships across the UK and internationally with venues, music hubs and universities that we plan to exploit. Our strategy for engaging partners and our ability to find funding to pay for the necessary capacity is also a key element of this plan.

## **ABOUT US**

Mahogany Opera Group is a leading commissioner and producer of opera and music theatre. Since the merger of The Opera Group and Mahogany Opera in 2014, we have commissioned and produced 16 world premiere productions and toured them extensively across the UK and internationally.

- *Folie a Deux* by composer Emily Hall and writer and lyricist Sjon with jazz singer Sofia Jernberg incorporated a new musical instrument, the electro-magnetic harp and live responsive lighting technology. It opened at the Borealis Festival Bergen and has performed eighteen times including at Kulturhuset Stockholm, Sacrum Profanum Krakow, The Curve Leicester, Spitalfields Festival, London Jazz Festival and Rotterdam Operadagen.
- *Brundibar* by Hans Krasa was premiered in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Our production, working with a different cast of 50-100 children in each region, toured to Southbank Centre, Watford Palace Theatre, Rosehill Theatre Cumbria, Young Norfolk Arts Festival, Aldeburgh Jubilee Hall.
- *Lost in Thought* by Rolf Hind was the world's first mindfulness opera. It premiered at the Barbican and toured to the Lowry, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and Pontio Bangor.
- *The Rattler* was an interactive re-telling of Rumpelstiltskin with puppetry and audience participatory songs by Stephen Deazley and Martin Riley. It toured extensively across the UK.
- *Snappy Operas* currently consists of ten 10-minute operas by composers such as Errollyn Wallen, Philip Venables, Kerry Andrew, Gwyneth Herbert and Luke Carver Goss. In its first two pilot years, we reached 1770 children in eleven different regions of the UK.
- *Mozart vs Machine* was a collage mash-up of Mozart and electronic music by Ergo Phizmiz which toured to some of the most interesting new writing and sound festivals in the UK including Folkestone Fringe, High Tide Aldeburgh, Sound Festival Aberdeen.
- *Various Stages Festival 2017* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts saw us undertake our first open call out for work (garnering 60 applications) and workshopping 6 ideas and showcasing them in front of a packed audience of major industry, partners and colleagues.
- *The Mother* by composer Laurence Osborn and writer Theo Merz based on the play by Witkiewicz was premiered at POSK in London. This project demonstrated how we could sole-produce and act as promoter.
- *On What Weft was Woven the Waters* by Rolf Hind was premiered at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. It was the first example of our new producing model of supporting the R&D of a project in partnership with a presenter.

The company is led by Artistic Director, Frederic Wake-Walker and Executive Manager, Allison Rosser. Other current, freelance staff are Marc Dunleavy (Snappy Opera producer), Caroline McKoen (Catalyst fundraiser) and Jenny Dewhirst (Finance Manager).

Our board comprises Penny Jonas (chair), David Bernstein and Ian Hamilton.

## **PERSONAL STATEMENT - EXPERIENCE . CONNECTIONS**

*Of the many words that have been thrown into the pot during the writing of this plan, two have risen to the top. They seem to capture, as effectively as words can, the work we do at Mahogany. Written in this particular way, they can be read as two distinct things or as an invitation.*

*The magic that occurs when everyone in the room is imagining the same thing*

*The moment of discovery when hearing a piece of music played for the very first time*

*The emotionally closed father putting his arm proudly round his child after a Snappy Opera performance*

*The teacher who is emboldened to be more playful in class*

*Listening to a composer give a pinpoint critique to another composer at a Various Stages feedback*

*The laughter in a rehearsal room and the warmth of an applause*

*The electric impulses that trigger your synapses as the sound waves crash against your skin*

*These are all things that come to my mind when I read these two words in the context of Mahogany.*

*And in a world where people seem to be becoming increasingly lonely and where old fault lines of division are being made more concrete we need, more than ever and for the fabric of our society, to experience connections.*

*Frederic Wake-Walker*

## **2. STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **VISION AND MISSION**

Our vision is for opera to be an inclusive, collaborative and dynamic artform that speaks meaningfully to people in today's society.

Our mission is to stretch the boundaries of what opera can be and who it is for.

We do this by:

- Making opera in new ways – upturning existing norms and hierarchies, combining playfulness and critical thought
- Bringing people together – sparking creative connections and making space for shared imaginations
- Focussing on process not product – supporting artists with a spirit of discovery and idealism, opening up the creative process to audiences and stakeholders and demystifying opera
- Searching out unique and diverse artists and participants – representing a multiplicity of voices and valuing quality of expression even over technical ability
- Being fleet of foot – going to different places and contexts with work that is adaptable and responsive
- Loving what we do and trusting everyone we work with – fostering strong ensembles and maintaining fruitful relationships

We hope over the next three years to grow our international reputation as one of the most forward-thinking opera companies in the world; to be regarded as an important hub for creativity and the development of work and talent while reaching genuinely new audiences and making a positive impact on people's lives.

Our long-term dreams are:

- For the Snappy Opera Festival to become a major national and international annual event of opera for young people
- To establish a space/context for an internationally renowned contemporary opera and music theatre festival
- To build the world's first transportable, trialectic operahouse

*No company in Britain is as committed to the creation of new music theatre as Mahogany. Their work is innovative, artist-led and collaborative, which makes working for them a deeply rewarding experience. Jessica Walker, singer*

## **ARTISTIC ACTIVITY – EXPERIENCE**

Our work sits within three clearly defined and complementary strands:

### **Education, Development, Performance**

Together, they span the typical life of an artist – discovering opera as a child, honing your skills as an emerging artist and finally showcasing your talents on the international stage.

A key objective of this plan has been to focus our work within each strand, enabling us to make deeper lines of inquiry while enabling us to articulate more clearly our work to partners, audiences and stakeholders.

Though the content of work within any given strand may vary hugely, the principles of each strand relate back very directly to our core vision and mission.

We will continue to make work that is scalable and flexible, both for the artistic freedom that this presents and because it allows us to respond to funding shortfalls without compromising quality.

We will always develop projects in partnership with others; sometimes as the lead producer and sometimes as a supporting partner providing expertise, especially in areas of R&D and partnership building (touring) as well as our ability to access specific funding. For example, we aim to come to a point where a music hub is leading on a batch of Snappys and we are simply providing support through our resource packs and teacher training days.

The creation of new work sits, as ever, at the core of our work. We do however want to expand the possibilities of working with material from beyond the 21st and 20th centuries as long as it's still being presented in an innovative way. This will open up new artistic possibilities and attract a broader audience.

*An astonishing performance overall...this certainly is opera for the 21st Century and appears to me to be a crucial example of how Mahogany have adopted new approaches to identify a future for this art form. Arts Council England independent assessment of Mozart vs Machine*

*Working with professionals is like a dream come true. You don't know what will happen next but you can't wait. Year 5 Pupil, Tower Hamlets, on Snappy Operas*

*...oddly touching, inspiring and, like life itself, absurd... I recommend you go along. Lost in Thought in The Guardian*

## **STRAND: EDUCATION**

Our dream is that every child should have the opportunity to experience opera before they leave school.

Our mission is to give young people ownership of opera. We do this by involving them in the creative process and giving them the chance to perform alongside professionals. We believe you can be totally inclusive without compromising on quality.

We actively seek out those with little or no opportunity to engage with music and theatre, in partnership with Music Hubs, other local organisations and venues. We work predominantly in schools. This allows us to reach young people beyond social barriers. We also support the professional development of teachers so that they can play an active role in our projects and have the confidence to continue using music and theatre to have an impact on the life of their school.

Our flagship project in this strand is **SNAPPY OPERAS**. A Snappy Opera is a 10-minute opera for children (aged 7-11) introducing all the essential elements of opera – singing, acting and making – in a fun, colourful and bite-size chunk. Each piece is designed to be performed by around 30 children, divided up into two or three sub-groups. You can perform one opera on its own or bring separate groups, classes or even schools together and perform a cluster of them like in a festival.

In the next three years we plan to:

- establish an annual Snappy Opera Festival
- create new Snappys with a SEND focus
- develop a robust Teacher CPD model
- grow and diversify our pool of delivery teams
- support Music Hubs to identify and train their own local delivery teams
- strengthen our existing relationships and develop new partnerships with Music Hubs and regional venues
- promote Snappy Operas internationally to venues, schools and organisations

Any other work that we undertake in this strand should complement Snappy Operas. For example, *The Fir Tree* will act as the perfect introduction for a school and their younger pupils before coming on board for a Snappy Opera. *The Fir Tree* by Emily Hall and Melanie Golding will be a 20-minute work with one professional singer/director and a musician/musical director with a modular chorus of children (aged 6-9) that, with preparatory support, can be mounted in a day.

*Utterly inspiring and amazing. The most well-organised and professional rehearsal I have been involved in over 25 years! It was amazing to have four experts for each rehearsal. Teacher, Snappy Operas*



## **STRAND: DEVELOPMENT**

We are all about development – of **work, talent, partnerships and audiences**. Our pioneering research and development programme **VARIOUS STAGES** underpins all our projects - developing work and talent for the here and now and artists and audiences of the future.

**Work** - we undertake workshops for opera makers (composers, writers, etc) to work collaboratively in real time and space with performing artists and technologies during the process of creation. All projects in Various Stages must be testing new methods of working, stretching the boundaries of opera or connecting relevantly to our contemporary world. Our focus is to develop an artist's practice and consequently shift the environment within which operas are made, rather than focus solely on producing product.

**Talent** – we offer bespoke opportunities to opera makers, creating an environment where they feel they can express themselves most honestly and thereby promoting a diversity of voices. Opportunities are made available through an open call process, which enables us to reach a broader range of artists – the application process is structured in a way so as not to discriminate against those who are less adept at expressing themselves through writing and/or those who come from a less formally academic background. We have developed our own form of critical response feedback designed to support artists to get the most out of the workshops. We are planning to introduce a more structured mentoring element that will involve established artists and emerging artists observing each other's work and sharing knowledge, thoughts and experience. We work with specific partners and colleagues to undertake an open call for Various Stages that actively searches out a broad and diverse range of artists.

**Partnerships** – we open up our workshops with showcases and feedback sessions, inviting potential producers, promoters and other stakeholders into the creative process at an early stage. This acts as a marketplace for the work and a networking opportunity for artists and promoters.

**Audiences** – by opening up the process in these ways, we challenge artists to consider the context within which they are working, making work that is relevant, resilient and sellable.

In the next three years we plan to:

- establish an annual Various Stages Festival
- become the associate mentoring company of the new Opera Making MA at Edinburgh University
- introduce a structured mentoring model as part of Various Stages
- actively search out a diverse range of artists that sit in the gaps between traditional roles, genres and cultures

*The work I create cannot be made without the workshops which happen at Various Stages. As a composer I need to learn how the minds and bodies of the performers work by being with them and feel how my music and words work in real time and space. Jamie Man, composer and Various Stages participant*

## STRAND: PERFORMANCE

Our productions challenge preconceptions of what opera can be; clashing cultures, shifting genres and challenging artists and audiences to go beyond themselves. We expect most of our productions to have grown out of Various Stages. Some will become our own in-house productions which we sell to venues and others will be taken up by associate promoters who will lead on its production with our support and knowledge.

Our flagship *in-house* production over the next three years will be **METAMORPHOSIS** – this project is a radical way of making work in that instead of starting with an idea, we start with the context. Previously we have created productions that are flexible enough to adapt to various venues on tour. We now plan to create one production that “morphs” depending on the context/space/artists involved. After a conversation with a venue partner, we will construct a bespoke version based on logistical and financial constraints as well as artistic desires.

Some fundamental principles will prevail:

- Performers and audience will occupy the same space – the performance will take place in and around the audience; intimate and responsive
- We will mix existing material from throughout history with improvisation and re-workings
- We will combine music from various genres together with spoken text, dance, digital technologies – placing classical music in a multi-disciplinary setting
- There will be no driven narrative, clear cut characters, traditional ideas of set and costume – the drama being created by the spatial/performance dynamic between performers - creating a new genre that could be described as post-dramatic music theatre
- Each event will have the vibe of a masque or a line-up of artists, taking into account the time of year and incorporating food and drink – becoming something celebratory, ritualistic and a one-off
- All performers involved will contribute to the creation and curation of the event – a form of collaborative composition

Other projects in development: Rolf Hind’s Rumi project with ENO and Wuppertal, Jamie Man’s circus oratorio with Deutsche-Symphonie Orchester.

In the next three years we plan to:

- Undertake a thorough series of meetings with potential partners both to sell our work and to establish the potential for a network of promoters for new Music Theatre
- Perform METAMORPHOSIS in at least five venues undertaking around fifteen performances in total
- Secure at least two co-productions

*This production undoubtedly represents the best of contemporary art collaboration. Folie à Deux in The London Word*

## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT – CONNECTIONS**

We are defined by people; the connections we make with partners, stakeholders and, most importantly, audiences.

We want everyone we engage with to be part of the family, to feel invested in Mahogany. People want to give something to us because they share in our core values and because we are able to fulfil a need in them.

## **PARTNERS**

Our **PARTNERS** are people we work with. They will bring their talent, networks or earned income. They include:

- **our residencies and associate venues**

Institute of Contemporary Arts – this is where we have our office. With the arrival of their relatively new artistic director, there are more opportunities for use of the performance spaces such as for our Various Stages Festival 2017.

Watford Palace Theatre – this is our registered address. We have been an associate company here since 2010. This relationship needs to be reviewed in light of this plan.

Edinburgh University – we are in the process of becoming the associate outside company for a new MA course in opera making, starting in 2020. Frederic Wake-Walker is an alumnus of Edinburgh University and has worked together with professor of composition, Gareth Williams, at Scottish Opera.

Rosehill Theatre, Cumbria – we have performed and co-produced all our education work with Rosehill since 2015. We are now working on a long-term programming plan with them that will involve work across all three of our strands.

- **our co-producers and promoters**

These are very specific to each of our strands.

**Education** – we have strong and burgeoning relationships with various Music Hubs and Multi-Academy Trusts including Leicester-Shire, Essex, North Tyneside, Durham, Tower Hamlets and David Ross Education Trust. In the next three years we plan to support our existing partners to be more autonomous when delivering Snappy Operas while continuing to search out new relationships. We are also looking to expand our work to festivals and arts venues across the UK, international arts organisations and both international and private schools – where we would expect levels of earned income to cover marginal costs and management.

**Development** – Aside from the ICA and Edinburgh University, we will work with co-producers who can offer space in kind for workshops and showcases.

**Performance** – we are currently undertaking an audit of co-producers and promoters in the UK and internationally for our performance work. We have identified festivals, venues in metropolises and international venues as priorities over the next three years. Though we are keen for our work to be performed in regional venues, we believe we need to establish our new style of work and gain a higher profile first before being able to extend its reach.

*Mahogany Opera Group supported the R&D of Rolf Hind's new piece 'On what weft are woven the waters' at this year's festival. When presenting as many world premieres as we do each year, to have collaborators who can focus resources and expertise on the developmental part of the process is invaluable. There is clearly a profound need for this within the industry too. Graham McKenzie, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival CEO and Artistic Director*

- **our artists and participants**

**Artists** - Unlike our other partners, we do not see our artists as defined by our strands. Every artist we work with is encouraged to bring their own distinct voice. We want to create an environment where they can do their best work and challenge them to do things they couldn't do elsewhere. We believe in the power of ensemble; creating a space that is full of curiosity, trust and good humour will produce the most fruitful and excellent results.

There are artists who we have worked with regularly or who we wish to work with again. We plan to promote more these artists with whom we have a special relationship in the hopes of reciprocal advocacy from them.

We are constantly searching for new artists. Finding artists of increasing diversity and with new ideas and techniques is an important currency. We undertake recruitment call outs, working with partners and networks to maximise our reach while always being attentive and curious about developments in other spheres.

**Participants** – most of our participants are engaged in our education strand. They are the children that take part in and the teachers and local leaders that support the projects. We treat our participants like artists in the sense that we value their creative input and quality of expression just as highly. We use the same language of the theatre and expect the same level of commitment. However, we are also aware that opera can feel very alien and that performing on stage can feel exposing. Our well-staffed delivery teams, online resources and inclusive philosophy are designed to give as much support as possible to everyone embarking on one of our projects.

*The opportunity for children, teachers and support staff to work alongside professional arts practitioners was one which everyone entered into with enthusiasm, producing in some cases transformational results. Our schools have a significant proportion of disadvantaged children, SEN and EAL, and this project offered everyone an equal playing field - for several children, this was the moment they felt they belonged to the school and its community. The final performances at Bridlington Spa were tremendous, with a large and appreciative audience witnessing their children performing on a professional stage to a very high standard. Simon Toyne, DRET*

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

Our **STAKEHOLDERS** are people who support us, predominantly through financial contributions. They include:

- **Our Board** – there is an opportunity to develop the board and we plan to make two or three new appointments following a recent audit in the coming months.
- **Our advocates** – are anyone who talks positively and knowledgeably about us, regardless of how much they are able to give financially. We plan to establish an informal group of advocates, giving them special insights into our work and asking them for peer reviews on an ad hoc basis.
- **Our individual donors** – We have our individual giving schemes: Director's Circle (£1001 pa) and Friends (£101pa). We see individuals as an area of potential growth. This new plan gives us the opportunity to renew various relationships that have recently dropped while also expanding our network of individuals. This we plan to do through the development of the board, being opportunistic with FWW's freelance career, appealing to individuals who are connected to the locality of our projects and promoting ourselves at conferences and events.
- **Trust & Foundations** – We have a strong track record of receiving support from Trust & Foundations. We expect Trust & Foundations to be even more willing to support us now that we've stepped away from the NPO. With this new plan, we feel confident to apply to more of the larger trusts for multi-year grants to support a particular strand of our work. We are however aware that competition for these grants is great and growing.
- **Statutory Funding** – We have a good relationship with Arts Council England and we share their goals and values. We have been successful in receiving Project Grants awards since leaving the NPO and we expect this relationship to continue. We are also exploring other statutory funding such as the Department of Education. Catalyst Evolve has had a huge impact on the organisation. This comes to a natural end in August 2019. We are therefore looking for an alternative match-funding scheme to replace this. We plan to launch the John Hughes Development Fund to leverage new funds from the legacy that we received from John in 2018.
- **Corporations** – have always been difficult for us to secure. We see opportunities of working with local companies on our Education work in particular. We also hope to find a corporate sponsor for the Snappy Opera and Various Stages Festivals once they've become more established.

We aim to maintain diverse income streams in order to avoid over-reliance on any one in particular. Our recent use of evaluation has already proved successful in supporting applications and we intend to integrate evaluation further into our work.

## **AUDIENCES**

Our **AUDIENCES** are anyone who comes to a performance or follows us on social media. The “who it is for” in our mission is crucial to us. We want to attract genuinely new and diverse audiences. We get a huge buzz from presenting our work to people who have never experienced live opera before and it has a positive impact on the way we develop and present our work. As an organisation without a venue or a box office, we must work closely with our partners to create an appropriate marketing strategy around each of our projects. As with our co-producers and promoters, our audiences vary depending on our strands.

**Education** – audiences are mostly the friends and families of the participants. Most of our Education performances are free, are conducted in a relaxed, child-friendly atmosphere and occur at times that work around childcare in order to maximise the opportunities for parents and guardians to attend. Our marketing material is designed to introduce those new to opera to the genre.

**Development** – our Various Stages showcases are designed predominantly as shop-windows for partners and stakeholders. Aside from selling potential productions, they are also opportunities for networking and raising the profile of the company and our artists.

**Performance** – our audiences for this strand are curious and willing to try something new. Their diversity is reflected in our work. They might follow other artforms, have a particular interest in experiential theatre or be a fan of one of our collaborators.

- **Audience data capture** – we run a variety of surveys after performances and during projects with audiences, artists and participants in collaboration with our partners. Though this enables us to capture audience data, our focus is less on the capturing of audience contact details and more concerned with garnering feedback which can improve our work and support funding applications.
- **Customer Relations Management** – we are in the process of undergoing an overhaul of our current data management systems which also involves analysis of current and future required capacity. We plan to undertake an audit of all our data capture and customer relations management which will feed into our marketing and digital strategies as well as support our capacity for partnership building.
- **Social media** – though we are always alive to new developments, we currently focus our social media activity on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- **Website** – our website is geared mainly towards our partners, stakeholders and the industry. We are in the process of updating the website in light of this plan, our recent rebrand and the imminent launch of our new resource packs for Snappy Operas.
- **Digital content** – we make various rich digital content relating to projects. Each activity is designed to fit with the specific project. We aim to make more videos like the BBC Snappy Opera video that has received over 500,000 views.
- **PR** – we would like to reach audiences beyond the traditional opera media outlets. We are always striving to connect with PR companies and promoters who can access new and diverse audiences for our work.

Whoever our audiences are, we want to develop them first into followers and then into partners and stakeholders. It is with this goal in mind that all our communications with audiences are informed.

### **3. OPERATIONS**

#### **RISKS & CHALLENGES**

The major risks to the organisation are:

- Loss of artistic quality and reputation due to new, untested work
- Raising insufficient unrestricted income to cover core costs
- Loss of key members of staff and board members
- Being let down by partners

The main challenges that we face are:

- Maintaining adequate operational capacity whilst remaining flexible and minimising overheads
- Achieving our ambitious artistic goals within modest production budgets
- Securing appropriate levels of financial investment from venue fees and partnership income
- Meeting fundraising targets within a competitive climate

#### **MITIGATION**

We plan to address these risks and challenges by:

- Various Stages – allowing us to mitigate against artistic and financial risk by testing work during the creative process, garnering feedback from the industry and encouraging early investment from partners
- Investing in partnerships – undertaking a strategic approach to building a network of partners and maintaining strong relationships while being firmer in our financial negotiations
- Maintaining a minimum core team and overheads while employing associate producers and freelancers – allowing us to expand and contract our team dependent on funding and bringing in people with specific and alternative networks and contacts
- Improving our offer of mentoring and training for staff and conducting a regular skills audit of the board
- Maintaining a healthy reserve and two designated funds to support current projects and future commissions
- Maintaining a baseline producing model that is scalable
- Making a proactive case for support from ACE and Trusts & Foundations while ensuring realistic targeting and multiple, balanced income streams

## **STAFFING**

Artistic Director, Frederic Wake-Walker combines working for Mahogany with a freelance career which recently includes productions at La Scala Milan, Glyndebourne Festival, Shanghai International Festival, Köln Oper, Opera National du Rhin and with the Cleveland Orchestra and the Deutsche Symphonie Orchester at the Berlin Philharmonie, working with conductors Franz Welser-Möst, Diego Fasolis, Robin Ticciati and Nicholas Collon.

Allison Rosser, who has recently taken up the newly created role of Executive Manager, works across the organisation on strategy, operations, funding, finances, communications and evaluation. She brings with her a unique knowledge and passion for Mahogany and the contemporary opera sector.

Frederic and Allison are key to the building and delivery of this plan. It is vital that they are given opportunities to develop professionally over the course of the next three years and supported to fulfil their (and consequently Mahogany's) potential.

The staffing model set out in our current business model amounts to 2 full-time members of staff – Artistic Director (part-time, freelance), Executive Manager (full-time), Snappy Opera Producer (part-time, freelance), Fundraiser (part-time, freelance), Finance Manager (part-time, freelance)

Our current team of staff are based in Berlin, London, Huddersfield and Glasgow. Although this presents certain logistical challenges, it also gives us a uniquely diverse perspective on our work; far-reaching opportunities for partnerships and meaningful connections both regionally and internationally.

We constantly monitor our salary and fee levels in order to remain competitive in attracting the best talent and winning its loyalty. It is a clear priority for us to maintain salary and fee levels across the permanent and freelance staff as well as for performers and creative teams. We pay fees to singers, technical staff and creative teams in line with unions including Equity, UK Theatre and Musicians Union and strive to keep fees consistent across projects.



## **GOVERNANCE**

Mahogany Opera Group is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The board currently comprises of three passionate and committed directors who bring expertise especially in fundraising, governance, finance and law. We are in the process of appointing two or three more members to the board, focusing on areas of fundraising, learning and participation, partnership building and strategic planning. We aim to have these new members in place by the end of 2019 at the latest. The expectation of a standard period on the board is two or three terms (a term being three years) but this may be longer or shorter through mutual agreement. There will be a review at the end of each term. The board will create opportunities for trustee development, regularly seek information and feedback on its own performance and undertake a review each year.

**Reporting and decision-making** - The timely and effective sharing of management information is critical to our organisational success. We hold quarterly board meetings and finance committee meetings. Senior management are in regular dialogue with individual board members to ensure due diligence and considered decision-making processes. We hold weekly management meetings to assess the smooth running of projects and operations and monthly senior management meetings focusing on strategy, programming, fundraising and communications. Our business plan is revised every six months when performance against targets is monitored and reassessed by core staff and the board. Our policies (Data Protection, Child Protection, Health & Safety, Finance) are reviewed by the board every two years.

**Succession planning** - The board has experience in recent years of responding to significant changes in the organisation (eg the appointing of a new Artistic Director to The Opera Group and the subsequent merger of The Opera Group with Mahogany Opera) and the company has a good system for shared information across the organisation which enables quick and effective handovers in the event of staff departures. The board is continuously reviewing its own composition to ensure a smooth succession of trustees and has the knowledge and procedures in place in the event of any required appointment to senior management positions in the future.

**Managing success** - Once baseline income targets and planned artistic activity are secure, we actively seek to exploit our existing work further, seizing on opportunities to expand the reach and maximise the value of the initial investment in a project. We have a clear idea as to the extra capacity that our current team of staff currently hold and have modelled what extra capacity would be needed in the event of expansions to our programme in any given year.

## **ADVOCACY, DISSEMINATION AND EVALUATION**

We are always looking for opportunities to increase our stature and reputation which in turn will increase our offer to core supporters and strengthen our hand in financial negotiations with partners. In association with Annabel Jackson Associates, we have successfully implemented evaluation models for all our work which we will continue to develop. This has contributed towards improving the quality of our work with thorough self-reflection and towards various successful funding applications.

**Conferences** - We attend a number of opera and music theatre conferences in order to promote our work, build networks and share our experiences with the sector; for example, Opera and Music Theatre Forum, RESEO, Opera Europa, Rotterdam Operadagen. We also plan to extend our reach by attending conferences and events outside the opera sector; for example, editorial intelligence, Music education tradefair.

**Advocates** – Our newly established informal group of advocates will consist of colleagues, people who work for our key partners, individual funders and fans of our work. We will give them special insight into the company and ask them for strategic advice and peer reviews of our projects on an ad hoc basis.

**Associate artists** – by promoting our regular and favoured artists as part of a loose family of associates, we aim to build both a sense of loyalty as well as opportunities for reciprocal promotion.

**Critical response feedback** – we have developed our own bespoke form of critical response feedback at Various Stages showcases in partnership with Sound and Music and inspired by Liz Lerman’s critical response methods. Our methods are designed to support the artists to gain the specific knowledge they need during the creative process and to encourage artists to consider always the context within which they are working.

## **FINANCIAL MODEL**

Our financial model is based on the principles of:

- Flexible budgeting, able to adapt and respond to change
- Strict control of expenditure
- Achievable income targets across multiple income streams
- Modest but fair salaries and fees
- Built-in contingencies of 5% on all projects

**Reserves and designated funds** - We pursue a conservative reserve policy, bearing in mind the gestation to fruition of our projects. The unrestricted reserves comprise the General Fund and two Designated Funds. We aim to maintain in the General Fund sufficient unrestricted reserves valuing a minimum of nine months of current annual expenditure in order to meet future core operating costs and to deliver on future commitments; and also, where appropriate, to take box office exposure.

The first Designated Fund is for current projects where funds received have been allocated by the trustees to projects which are currently under way but the cost of which is borne in subsequent accounting periods. The level of this reserve mainly results from the relationship between the pattern of funding and the company's production schedules. The second Designated Fund is primarily for future productions or commissions. We are committed to the commissioning and developing of new opera, the funding of which may be required two or three years before its production and before funds are specifically raised for that purpose.

**Financial systems** - The organisational finances are managed on a day-to-day basis by the Artistic Director, Executive Manager and Finance Manager and overseen on a quarterly basis by the Finance Committee, where detailed discussions on financial strategy and long-term planning are also considered. Annual budgets are not signed off until a significant level of income has been secured. Over 70% of our expenditure is directed towards realising productions, a level we will aim to maintain over the next three years. Fees and salaries are aligned with union minimums and comparable organisations.