

Out Of Her Mouth – Dunedin Consort,
Hera and Mahogany Opera come
together to breathe life into 300 year-old
'operas' that have never been staged in
Britain before.

**DUNEDIN
CONSORT**

8th June 2023

Out Of Her Mouth

Written by women, about women, for women

**DUNEDIN
CONSORT**

**WE ARE
HERA**


MAHOGANY OPERA

23 June – 12 July 2023

Findhorn, Glasgow, Edinburgh, York, London

Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre Cantates Bibliques: 'Judith', 'Rachel' & 'Susanne'

Carolyn Sampson, Anna Dennis, Alys Mererid Roberts – Sopranos

Modern English translations by Toria Banks

Directed by Mathilde Lopez

Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's biblical cantatas are **extraordinary historical jewels**. Written by a woman, about women, for women, they tell bold, unflinching tales about love, marriage, tragedy and adultery, each one a tiny opera in all by name.

These breath-taking miniatures – in **new English translations by Toria Banks and directed by Mathilde Lopez**– will receive their **UK premieres** more than 300 years after they were composed. Out Of Her Mouth will be performed in atmospheric, accessible settings that champion the ability of women to tell their own stories and narrate their own experiences from the Highlands of Scotland to central London.

Translator, Producer & Joint Artistic Director, Hera Toria Banks said: “I’ve been thinking about this project since I first read and heard the Cantates Bibliques, particularly those that tell knotty stories about Biblical women, because while there are exceptions, complex narratives about female experience are pretty rare in the operatic canon.”

But as much as the stories themselves, it’s also about the way they’re told, with a single female singer holding the stage in an authoritative way, and presenting the different characters including the men.

Toria Banks added: “I think you can feel Jacquet de la Guerre’s confidence and ease as a mature composer in these pieces. Within each one there’s a lot of musical variety and a fascinating relationship between teller and tale, characterised by nuance and irony and all sorts of subtle shifts of tone. They’re very fleet of foot, which feels very contemporary.”

Out Of Her Mouth is directed by **Mathilde Lopez**, a freelance director and the artistic director of August 012 theatre company.

Lopez said: “These are three stories about sex and power and ultimately the perpetuation of patriarchy. We are narrating the heroic moments in the lives of three women from the bible: Susanne, Rachel and Judith who endure and overcome different but equally perilous situations.

“Surprising and complex, these baroque vignettes display varied dilemmas and moral contortions but all have in common the very recognisable fear, solitude and violence generated by constant unwanted sexual attention, harassment and objectification. Our women are all kneaded by male violence and the thousand years of abuse that comes with having a female body.

“In Out Of Her Mouth we are presenting these three pieces together as variations on female oppression. Performed by 3 different singers, 4 musicians, 5 watermelons and 7 large blue rolls, we are staging the one long story of accumulated frustrations, anger, wounds and violences of Susanne, Rachel and Judith and lay it bare for the audience to see.

“There will be knives, watermelons and destruction – with regular cleaning and resetting.”

In writing an English version Banks set out to preserve the sinuous quality in the dynamic relationship between singer and story and audience. “I think I’m always trying to translate ‘faithfully’, but you do have to be faithful to a number of different things at once. There are the original words (by Antoine Houdar de la Motte), but also I think you owe something to the central characters and their plausibility and wholeness as women, and to the emotional shape of the music which is aiming at effects on an audience that is very different to the one originally imagined (we can’t all be Louis XIV). And everyone deserves a clear, singable, idiomatic text.”

It’s definitely a feminist project. But it’s not just about performing music by women. That’s important, but ‘Yay for women!’ isn’t enough. It’s a show about three women characters who are all trying to exercise agency and live fully in really constrained circumstances. The actions they take, and the things that they bear, living under patriarchy come at a cost to themselves. There’s real power and beauty in hearing that expressed.

The three characters and stories are told by **three fabulous sopranos: Carolyn Sampson** immerses us in the story of Judith, **Anna Dennis** in that of Rachel and **Alys Mererid Roberts** brings us the story of the young Susanne.

Throughout Out Of Her Mouth the three partners have sought to **create opportunities for professional development**, offering support and mentoring to an artist appointed by open call to each area of the production. Dunedin Consort has appointed **Katarzyna Kowalik** as harpsichordist, Hera has engaged Welsh soprano **Alys Mererid Roberts**, and Mahogany Opera has appointed **Mathilde Lopez** to the directorial team.

Working with Mahogany Opera on Dido’s Ghost in 2021 marked the beginning of a wonderful new partnership for Dunedin Consort.

Dunedin Consort's Chief Executive, Jo Buckley commented: "It was a real meeting of minds, where we discovered a shared passion for exploring new ideas, pushing our boundaries, and opening up the world of opera in brilliant and creative ways. So, we are thrilled to be partnering with Mahogany Opera again for *Out Of Her Mouth*, and to be working with Hera for the very first time, particularly given their specialism in representing stories told by and about women."

This project marks the **culmination of Dunedin Consort's 22/23 season** and is the perfect way to bring it to a close. Bringing early music to life and in fresh and insightful ways is at the heart of Dunedin Consort's mission.

Jo Buckley added: We want to spark curiosity in our listeners, and what could be more thrilling than Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's biblical cantatas, now 300 years old and never before staged in the UK? Composed by a woman, about women, for women, these powerful miniature operas deserve to be far better known – and we can't wait to give them the prominence they deserve across Scotland, in York and in London this summer."

Making their work as accessible as possible to both audiences and performers drives all three ensembles. The potential to enjoy *Out Of Her Mouth* will be widened with the use of creative captions, audio description introductions and the film of it will be released later this year as part of National Centre for Early Music's online Christmas festival.

Out Of Her Mouth is a partnership between Dunedin Consort, Hera, Mahogany Opera and the National Centre for Early Music