

Opera about PT Barnum and Jenny Lind, who led the way for the modern celebrity, gets UK premiere

Royal College of Music

28 June – 3 July



Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (1820-1887) had a reputation that rivalled that of The Beatles or Elvis Presley when she toured the US in 1850, paving the way for the modern touring artist and setting the stage for the celebrity influencer.

Now, the extraordinary tale of Lind's tour, famously promoted by 'The Greatest Showman' PT Barnum, comes to life in a captivating new opera by Libby Larsen. It will receive its UK premiere later this month in a new production from the Royal College of Music's Opera Studio, directed by Ella Marchment.

Lind, known as the "Swedish Nightingale," stands as one of the most revered opera singers of the 19th century. Her London debut in 1847 moved Queen Victoria to shower her with flowers, and her

subsequent European tour only amplified her acclaim. When Lind arrived in the United States, the New-York Tribune proclaimed her as "the greatest singer we have ever heard." Her American tour saw an astonishing 93 large-scale concerts, equivalent to earning an impressive £9.8m in today's currency. Whilst she invested it in establishing free schools in Sweden, Barnum made four times that amount and spent the money on himself.

Barnum created an unprecedented marketing phenomenon around Lind. Even before her arrival in America, he promoted her benefit concerts in Europe, going as far as mortgaging all his properties to fund their transatlantic voyage and tour. Barnum's innovative strategies ensured Lind's popularity reached American audiences well before her performances, with 26 journalists on his payroll. However, it is worth noting that Barnum's marketing efforts included the unauthorised sale of Jenny Lind-branded merchandise such as songs, clothes, chairs, pianos, and even sausages, which held no financial value for Lind herself.

Libby Larsen's opera, *Barnum's Bird*, examines the problematic questions that arose from Lind's American tour. It interrogates the relationship between the individual and society at large, questioning the role of art and entertainment.

"The story of Jenny Lind, a hardheaded businesswoman and a world-class artist, and PT Barnum, an equally hardheaded businessman and a world-class showman, is a compelling musical drama" says the composer, Libby Larsen. "It is also an extraordinary vehicle to gain insight into ourselves as lovers of art and consumers of entertainment" she continues. "It is the story of art, artists, and the human soul."

At last receiving its UK premiere, the two-act chamber opera will be produced by a majority female team led by director Ella Marchment. The fact that the performances are taking place at the Royal College of Music is pertinent too, as Lind eventually became one of only two female professors there when it opened in 1882.

-ENDS-

For further information, please contact Premier:

Edward Christian-Hare | edward.christian-hare@premiercomms.com | 07870 859633

Notes to Editors

Performances of *Barnum's Bird* take place on 28 & 30 June and 1 & 3 July. Details can be found [here](#).

For all the latest updates, follow the RCM on social media:

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

Music for *Barnum's Bird* is by Libby Larsen, libretto by Bridget Carpenter and Libby Larsen. © Oxford University Press Inc. 2002, assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. All rights reserved.

About the Royal College of Music

Founded in 1882, the Royal College of Music (RCM) is a world-leading music conservatoire with a prestigious history and contemporary outlook. More than 900 undergraduate and postgraduate students come from over 50 countries and are taught in a dynamic environment, leaving the RCM to become the outstanding performers, conductors, and composers of the future.

In 2023 and 2022, the RCM was ranked as the global number 1 institution for performing arts in the prestigious QS World University Rankings by Subject. RCM professors are leaders in their fields, and under such expert guidance, RCM students regularly achieve remarkable success around the globe.

The Royal College of Music has trained some of the most important figures in British and international music including composers and performers such as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Leopold Stokowski, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Neville Marriner, Dame Joan Sutherland, Sir Thomas Allen, Dame Sarah Connolly, Tarik O'Regan, Lord Lloyd Webber, Sir James Galway, Anna Meredith MBE, Louise Alder and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

Regular visitors to the RCM include Sir Thomas Allen, Vladimir Ashkenazy, the late Bernard Haitink, Alina Ibragimova and Lang Lang. Our recent honorary doctorates include Sir Antonio Pappano, Jonas Kaufmann, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Bryn Terfel, Steve Reich and Maxim Vengerov (Polonsky Visiting Professor of Violin).