

Thebans

Julian Anderson (b.1967)

Frank McGuinness (b.1953)

WORLD PREMIERE

Director, Pierre Audi

Conductor, Edward Gardner

English National Opera gives world premiere of British composer Julian Anderson's first opera, *Thebans*

Opening Saturday 3 May 2014, 7.30pm at London Coliseum (7 performances)

Thebans, the first opera by Julian Anderson with a libretto by Frank McGuinness, will receive its world premiere by English National Opera. This is the first of a series of new British operas to be premiered by ENO over the next two years, which will champion British talent to a global audience. This epic production is led by a world-class creative team, including director Pierre Audi, Irish playwright and poet Frank McGuinness and ENO Music Director Edward Gardner.

Thebans is based on the three Theban plays by Sophocles – *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*, which chronicle the cursed life of the mythical monarch Oedipus and his daughter Antigone. The three plays are reworked as three acts, and retold in non-chronological order, focusing on the death of Antigone before that of her father Oedipus, in order to exploit the full dramatic potential of this complex familial and political story.

Described by the *Evening Standard* as “one of the finest composers of his generation”, Julian Anderson is well-known for his exemplary vocal writing, having written *Alleluia* for the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall in 2007 and *Harmony*, which opened the 2013 BBC Proms, of which *The Times* commented, “Rarely can a Proms season have opened so quietly, or vast choral and orchestral forces been used with such exquisite fastidiousness”.

In addition to his post as Professor of Composition and Composer in Residence at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Julian is also Composer in Residence at the Wigmore Hall, Composer in Residence at the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Director of the LPO's Leverhulme Young Composers programme. In 2013, Julian was awarded the South Bank Show Award for his orchestral work *The Discovery of Heaven* and for education work with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Playwright Frank McGuinness is well known for his translations and adaptations of works by Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht, Strindberg, Racine and Euripides. His version of *Oedipus the King* premiered at National Theatre in 2008 with Ralph Fiennes in the title role. He has recently been named the recipient of the 2014 Irish Pen Award for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature.

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Founder of the Almeida Theatre and current Artistic Director of Dutch National Opera and the Holland Festival, Pierre Audi makes his directorial debut at ENO. Pierre is well-known as a visionary director, having commissioned many new works for Dutch National Opera, including Jonathan Harvey's *Wagner Dream* in 2007, which Pierre directed for WNO in 2013, of which the Sunday Telegraph said, "...Pierre Audi's production is simplicity itself...a visually seductive framework for this important modern opera".

The set for *Thebans* has been designed by Tom Pye, who has designed several productions for ENO, including *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *Death in Venice* and *The Messiah*. Completing the design team are costume designer Christof Hetzer, lightning designer Jean Kalman and video designer Lysander Ashton.

ENO's Music Director Edward Gardner leads an exceptional, predominantly British cast which includes Roland Wood as Oedipus, Peter Hoare as Creon, ENO Harewood Artist Julia Sporsén as the doomed Antigone, Matthew Best as Tiresias, Susan Bickley as Jocasta and Christopher Ainslie as Messenger/Theseus.

Joining them are ENO Harewood Artist Anthony Gregory, as Haemon/Strangers, young baritone Jonathan McGovern as Polynices and Paul Sheehan as Shepherd.

Thebans opens at the London Coliseum on 3 May 2014 for 7 performances – 3, 8, 10, 23 May and 3 June 7.30pm and 17, 31 May, 6.30pm

Pre-performance talk: Thursday 8 May, 5.15pm-6.00pm, £5/£2.50 concessions

A co-production with Theater Bonn

New production supported by The Boltini Trust, PRS for Music Foundation and ENO's Contemporary Opera Group

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Notes to Editors:

English National Opera (ENO) is the UK's leading producer of world-class opera, sung in English. Working with the very best talent from across the arts and creative industries, we create distinctive, highly theatrical productions and stage more new work and contemporary opera than any other UK opera company. We champion British and British-trained talent by placing it at the heart of our performances and providing unique development programmes for singers, musicians, composers and conductors. Our productions are seen by audiences across the world thanks to partnerships with its most celebrated opera houses. Through all our activities we aim to make our work enjoyable, accessible and affordable for as many people as possible.

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