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For Immediate Release

Mischievous mayhem and tragic love: WNO's Autumn 2021 Season at Theatre Royal Plymouth

- Company debuts for director Lindy Hume, designer Isabella Bywater and cast members Alexia Voulgaridou and Leonardo Caimi, with Joyce El-Khoury returning in new production of *Madam Butterfly*
- 35-year anniversary of classic Rossini production

This Autumn Welsh National Opera return to Theatre Royal Plymouth with a new production of Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*. Performing from 14 – 16 October, the Company will also bring a performance of WNO's much-loved production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

The Barber of Seville

The Season opens with Giles Havergal's original 1986 production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, with Giles returning as director and Frederick Brown conducting. This production celebrates 35 years and was last performed by WNO in 2011 with Andrew Shore who returns as Dr Bartolo this Autumn. Nicholas Lester returns to the Company as one of opera's most colourful characters, Figaro, with Nico Darmanin reviving the flirty and flamboyant Count Almaviva. Heather Lowe returns to WNO as Rosina, after her Company debut in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in 2018, and Keel Watson makes his WNO debut as Basilio and The Bonze in *Madam Butterfly*.

Madam Butterfly

The new production of *Madam Butterfly* directed by Australian director Lindy Hume and conducted by James Southall, will explore socially relevant themes of Puccini's classic tale with its beautiful music providing the backdrop to this much-loved opera.

Set in a dystopian future where love is a commodity, this new production of the opera is not



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only true to Puccini's moving score but provides perspective on the relevance this story still has in society today. The set and costumes are designed by award-winning designer Isabella Bywater. Lighting designer Elanor Higgins returns to WNO after her Company debut in 2018 with the rip-roaring suffragette opera *Rhondda Rips It Up!*

Soprano Joyce El-Khoury returns to WNO and makes her role debut as Cio-Cio San. The role is shared with Alexia Voulgaridou who makes her WNO debut. Alexia is a regular guest at many of Europe's prestigious opera houses and made her debut playing the title role in *Madam Butterfly* at the Hamburg State Opera in 2012. Also making their Company debuts are Leonardo Caimi in the role of Pinkerton and Neil Balfour as Prince Yamadori. Leonardo has been described as one of the most acclaimed tenors of his generation and has performed at the Salzburg Festival, Teatro Real in Madrid, the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden where he made his debut in the 2018/2019 season. Neil is a graduate of the National Opera Studio and was the first opera singer to be booked by Glastonbury Festival in the Astrolabe Tent. The role of Suzuki will be played by Kezia Bienek, completing the cast are Tom Randle and Mark Stone.

Continuing WNO's commitment to talent development, Weston Jerwood Fellow Gareth Chambers will be second assistant director for *Madam Butterfly*. WNO's Associate Artist Adam Gilbert has been cast as cover for Pinkerton in *Madam Butterfly* and Isabelle Peters as second cast and cover as Berta in *The Barber of Seville*.

Lindy Hume, *Madam Butterfly* Director said: *"This is not a business-as-usual moment. The last 18 months especially have brought home our hunger for human connection through live performance, especially live music. It is thrilling to anticipate that moment of reconnection with the magnificent artists and audiences of Welsh National Opera with the creation of a new production of Puccini's Madam Butterfly, a work of great beauty and brutality. In these times of complexity, uncertainty, and change, I relish this creative journey with the cast and team at WNO as we revisit and reimagine this much-loved opera."*

January 2022 will see the WNO Orchestra resuming its annual New Year's concert tour around Wales and South West England in its programme of Viennese highlights under the direction of WNO Concertmaster, David Adams.

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For further information please contact the Media and Communications team on public.relations@theatroyal.com / 01752 230439

WNO production images are available for download at <http://www.wno.org.uk/press>

PLYMOUTH	Thu 14 Oct	Madam Butterfly	7.15pm
THEATRE ROYAL	Fri 15 Oct	Madam Butterfly	7.15pm
Box Office (01752) 267222	Sat 16 Oct	The Barber of Seville	7.15 pm

- Welsh National Opera is the national opera company for Wales, funded by the Arts Councils of Wales and England to provide large scale opera, concerts and outreach work across Wales and to major English regions. We provide transformative experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds through our education and outreach programme and our award-winning digital projects. We work with our partners to discover and nurture young operatic talent, and we aim to show future generations that opera is a rewarding, relevant and universal art form with the power to affect and inspire.
- *Welsh National Opera is delighted to be returning to the stage and performing for audiences again. As a Company numerous safety measures and risk assessments have been put in place to protect staff, performers and crew in rehearsals and on tour and continue to adhere to all Welsh Government guidelines. Partner venues are also working hard to ensure that audiences can feel safe while in their buildings watching WNO performances. Each venue has its own set of guidelines and information which is available, and regularly updated, on their websites.*
- *The Barber of Seville* is a co-production with Opera North and Vancouver Opera
- *The Barber of Seville* is dedicated to the memory of Clive Richards
- WNO's 75th anniversary performances are supported by Colwinston Charitable Trust
- WNO's Talent Development programme is supported by the Kirby Laing Foundation and the Bateman Family Charitable Trust
- WNO Associate Artist programme is supported by the Shirley & Rolf Olsen Bursary, The Thriplow Charitable Trust, The Fidelio Charitable Trust and Garrick Charitable Trust.
- The Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries 2020-2022 programme is designed and produced by Jerwood Arts. It is funded and supported by Arts Council England's Transforming Leadership Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Art Fund, Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland, British Council, Jerwood Arts and PRS Foundation.



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- WNO's Youth, Community and Digital activity is supported by a generous gift from the Garfield Weston Foundation

Theatre Royal Plymouth (TRP) is a registered charity providing art, education and community engagement in Plymouth and across the region. It engages and inspires with the aim of touching lives. Theatre Royal Plymouth presents a year-round programme of world class productions on all scales as the South West's principal centre for performing arts.

Theatre Royal Plymouth works with partners to understand the challenges people face accessing the arts, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged people. It creates pathways that are genuinely accessible to those who might otherwise never get to engage with the arts. They collaborate to co-create and co-author work that represents the community, creating the space needed for people to tell their story in their own way.

Theatre Royal Plymouth is the UK's largest regional producing theatre. With a focus on embracing the vitality of new talent and supporting emerging and established artists. It collaborates with a range of partners to provide dynamic cultural leadership for the city of Plymouth.