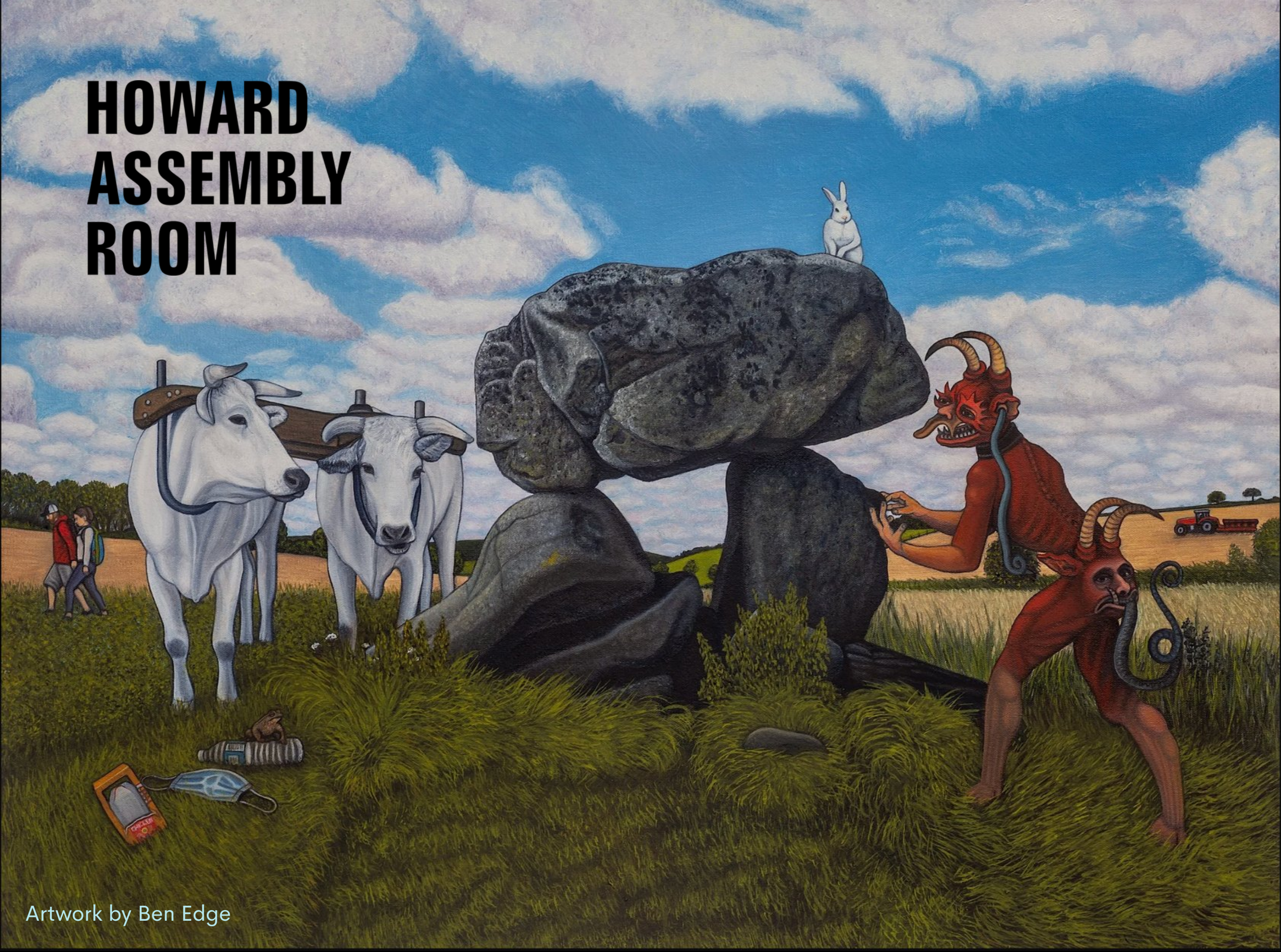
HOWARD ASSEMBLY ROOM



Artwork by Ben Edge

Saturday 15th November 2025

THE DEVIL'S DEN

An opera by Isabella Gellis

Welcome from Opera North

Opera North is thrilled to collaborate with Shadwell Opera to bring The Devil's Den to life at the Howard Assembly Room. We're delighted to welcome Sheffield City Morris to this production, and this new venture marks an exciting step in our commitment to nurturing bold new operatic voices and creating work that pushes boundaries. We're so pleased you're here to share this moment with us.

Isla Mundell-Perkins
Director of Artistic Administration

SHADWELL

Shadwell Opera is one of the UK's leading contemporary opera voices. Since winning a Herald Angel Award at the Edinburgh Festival in 2009, their critically acclaimed productions of contemporary masterpieces have been seen by audiences across the UK in theatres, churches, warehouses, schools and community centres. Their staging of Where the Wild Things Are toured internationally, first to the Mariinsky, St. Petersburg and then to Bamberg, in partnership with the Bamberg Symphony. Shadwell experiments with new operatic forms and voices, with its recent series of digital commissions exploring the limits of musical storytelling through binaural audio. The company is now committed to commissioning the classics of the future, celebrating the unrivalled quality and variety in young British composers. The Devil's Den is its first full-length opera commission.

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Orchestra
Fra Rustumji **violin 1**
Iohan Coman **violin 2**
Josh Hayward **viola**
Max Ruisi **'cello**
Gwen Reed **double bass**
Hannah Anderson **flute**
Eleanor Tinlin **oboe**
James Gilbert **clarinet**
Patrick Bolton **bassoon**
Isaac Shieh **horn**
Lucy Humphis **trumpet**
Benny Vernon **trombone**
Matthew Fletcher **piano**
Elin Samuel **harp**
James Larter **percussion**

Cast
Jennifer France **child**
Ossian Hutchkinson **druid**
Lotte Betts-Dean **devil**
Nicholas Morris **rabbit/toad**

Creative Team
Isabella Gellis **composer & librettist**
Jack Furness **director & designer**
Rachel Wise **associate director & movement**
Finnegan Downie Dear **musical director**
Emma Laister **morris choreography**
Rhiannon Llewellyn **production assistant**

Morris Dancers
Jonathan Vidler
Pam Roddis
Stella Roddis
Julia Hickman-Wyatt
Kevin Allbones
Steve Carley
Dominic Rice

Production Team
Kathryn Gašić **Opera North projects producer**
Kev Cooke **HAR tech manager**
Rhiannon Llewellyn **production assistant**
George Ploog **HAR Technician**
Ean Rooney **HAR Technician**
Abi Rudd **HAR Technician**

Stage Management
Lindsey Gardiner
Alexandra Turner

A note from the composer…

"The Devil's Den" is a Neolithic monument in Wiltshire. I was first made aware of it through a painting by Ben Edge. He writes: "it is said that every night at midnight the Devil himself arrives with eight white oxen in an attempt to pull off the capstone but to no avail. A white rabbit with fiery eyes is also said to sit on top and offers his encouragement and advice. It is local belief that if a good child runs around the Devil's Den seven times that nothing will happen, but if a bad child does the same they will be met by a fire breathing toad". I built the story of my opera around this tale, weaving in other elements of ritual, superstition and belief. This story focuses on a child who has been instructed by a Druid to run around the dolmen every night, in order to protect her mother's unborn baby. The devil and rabbit also gather at the dolmen nightly, for reasons unknown, but with an obsessive desire to remove the capstone. We see a lot of the opera through the child's perspective: references aren't fully explained, leaving a level of ambiguity that we have to accept as fact. Similarly, the two characters assumed to be imagined by the child (the devil and the rabbit) are very tangible, whereas the child's mother is not physically present, represented only by a squealing trumpet. In many ways, this feeling of being misunderstood is shared by the child and the devil. It takes place in a nameless, timeless village in England, but I think what I'm trying to convey is pretty universal. This opera is not a collage of folk music, and you will find just one pre-existing tune throughout; however, melody and tactility are things I'm naturally drawn to, and I have enjoyed amplifying those qualities within this piece. The Morris side punctuate the drama, functioning as a Greek chorus.

Isabella Gellis



Poem" Butterfly' by Isabella Gellis, aged 5

Synopsis

Scene 1
In a nameless town, in an unknown time, somewhere in England, a Druid is holding a town meeting. The villagers are seeking his advice for their wide-ranging problems, and the Druid duly provides solutions. A mother asks how she can maintain her pregnancy successfully, and he instructs that she send her other child, "good" and "pure", to run around a local dolmen (ancient burial chamber) seven times every night until the baby is born.

Dance 1: Bells

Scene 2
The child obliges, happily singing a song whilst tallying the revolutions, but is scared off by the arrival of two unknown creatures. Observing from a distance, the child witnesses the Devil, unintelligibly shrieking and screeching, trying to remove the capstone from the dolmen, whilst a giant rabbit offers single words of encouragement and reassurance. The Devil's attempts
continually prove fruitless, and they become disheartened and frustrated, which emboldens the Child's curiosity, who initiates a dialogue. The Devil and Child do not speak the same language, but through means of translation from the Rabbit, and imitation of sound and gesture, they begin to relate to each other.

Dance 2: Sticks

Scene 3
Time has passed, and the Child is at home reading a list to their mother, of potential activities they can do together. First the mother asks the Child to sing a song, and then the Child is instructed to collect more ramsons (wild garlic) to make tea with. Reluctant at first, the Child is reassured by the thought that their "new friends" know where to find more, and so contently leaves for the dolmen. Once there, the Child is welcomed by the Rabbit and Devil, and they fall into a trance-like state, trying to topple the capstone. The capstone falls. The Rabbit turns into a fire-breathing toad, and the Devil, in a frenzied state, scares away the Child.

Dance 3: Hankies

Scene 4
The Druid is holding another town-meeting, with the Child seemingly on trial. The mother has had a miscarriage, and it is deemed to be the child's fault- the Druid says that the child gave their mother white hellebore (an abortifacient herb) instead of ramsons. With the capstone fallen, and the baby dead, the Druid understands the child to be "bad", and implies there will be justice.

Dance 4: Beasts

Scene 5
A "charivari" approaches in the distance. (A charivari was a folk custom designed to shame and condemn members of the community for their wrongdoings, in the form of cacophonous parades and mock serenades. Broadly, this type of custom would be called 'rough music'.) The Druid leads town into a hysterical ruckus, chanting condemnations at the child, who "must atone". Shifting into a moment of tenderness, the Druid leads the audience, orchestra, dancers and cast in a warm and rousing chorale-like singalong to deliver the Child's final judgment – to be left to the Devil. The child is abandoned, tied to the dolmen. The Devil appears, and they leave together holding hands.



Finnegan Downie Dear

musical director

Finnegan Downie Dear studied at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music. Recent projects include productions with the Royal Ballet and Opera, Theater an der Wien and the Festival Aix-en-Provence. In the future he looks forward to returning to the State Operas of Berlin and Dresden, as well leading new productions for Opéra de Lyon, Opera Australia and Garsington Opera. In concert he works regularly with orchestras including the Camerata Salzburg, Staatskapelle Berlin, Swedish Chamber Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He is the winner of the 2020 International Mahler Conducting Competition of the Bamberg Symphony and since September 2025 is the Artistic Director of Shadwell Opera, with whom he has previous led productions of Into the Little Hill, Erwartung/ Twice Through the Heart, The Lighthouse, Where the Wild Things Are and The Devil's Den.



Isabella Gellis

composer & librettist

Isabella Gellis is a British-Canadian composer of acoustic music. Her work often focuses on imagined and disguised sounds, steeped in the silly, absurd, and surreal. Recent commissions have been from the London Symphony Orchestra, 12 Ensemble, Manchester Camerata, and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal. Her debut album "The Dissolute Society Comprised of All Sorts" has just been released by Flung Records.



Jack Furness

Director & Designer

Jack Furness is an award-winning director, producer and video designer, and the founder of Shadwell Opera.

This season, he makes his house debut at Welsh National Opera with a new production of Der fliegende Holländer, and directs The Importance of Being Earnest for Garsington Opera. He also returns to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as revival director of Turandot. In 2025 he has been writing and developing a spatial audio codebreaking experience with support from Immersive Arts UK.

Recent directing credits include Hamlet (Buxton International Festival), The Queen of Spades (Garsington Opera), Hansel and Gretel (Royal Academy of Music), Candide (Scottish Opera); Aci, Galatea e Polifemo (London Handel Festival), Faust (Irish National Opera), The Snow Maiden (Royal Northern College of Music), Rusalka (Garsington Opera, Edinburgh International Festival); Don Giovanni (Nevill Holt Opera).



Jennifer France

The Child

A previous Emerging Artist at Scottish Opera, British soprano Jennifer France was winner of the 2018 Critics' Circle Emerging Talent Award.

25/26 sees Jennifer sing Tytania in Peter Hall's production of Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream in Glyndebourne's Autumn season. Jennifer will also return to the Royal Opera House, London to sing First Niece in Deborah Warner's production of Peter Grimes and to Garsington to sing Cecily Cardew in Gerry Barry's The Importance of Being Earnest. On the concert stage, Jennifer joins the London Philharmonic Orchestra with Ed Gardner conducting Hans Abrahamsen's Let me tell you, sings Ligeti's Requiem firstly with Esa Pekka Salonen and the Orchestre de Paris and then at the Berwaldhallen and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. A prolific contemporary artist, she has sung Gerald Barry's The Eternal Recurrence with the Britten Sinfonia, which was recorded for Signum, and in the world premiere of Brett Dean's In This Brief Moment with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Nick Collon. She made her BBC Proms debut (2017) and Salzburg Festival debut (2019) singing Pascal Dusapin's Medeamaterial with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin.



Lotte Betts-Dean

The Devil

Praised for her "irrepressible sense of drama and unmissable, urgent musicality" (The Guardian), Australian mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean is passionate about curation and programming, with a broad repertoire that encompasses contemporary, chamber and early music, as well as art song, opera, oratorio and non-classical collaborations. Recent highlights include performances in Bayerische Staatsoper's Die Passagierin and Aldeburgh Festival's world premiere of A Visit to Friends, as well as debuts with Ensemble Musikfabrik and London Sinfonietta. Lotte also recently joined the Colin Currie Group for performances of Steve Reich's Drumming, and the Manchester Collective in their tour to Germany. The 2025/26 season sees the launch of Lotte's album everything you've ever lived on Delphian Records, a return to the Bayerische Staatsoper, and major debuts with the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg and Philharmonia Orchestra. In 2024, Lotte won the Young Artist Award at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, who praised her as "a visionary performer, initiating one bold collaboration after another."



Nick Morris

The Rabbit & The Toad

Nicholas trained at RSAMD. A flexible performer of works from Handel to Wagner, he has sung across the world from Glyndebourne to Brooklyn, in locations including a disused lighting factory in Portugal, Barts Pathology Museum, and appeared on Good Morning Croatia.

With Shadwell Opera he has performed in Glass' In the Penal Colony; Maxwell Davies' Eight Songs for a Mad King; and Knussen's Where the Wild Things Are in Bamberg, Alexandra Palace and the Bolshoi, St Petersburg.

Recent roles include Mephistopheles, Faust; Scarpia, Tosca; Klingsor, Parsifal; Nick Shadow, The Rake's Progress; Ned Keene, Peter Grimes; Mozart's Count in Le Nozze di Figaro; Monterone, Rigoletto; Smirnoff, The Bear; and Escamillo, Carmen.

He has performed in various world premieres including King Kong by Jeffrey Ching for Theater Magdeburg, recorded Margaret Catchpole by Stephen Dodgson for Naxos, and played the title role in To See the Invisible by Emily Howard at Snape Maltings.



Ossian Huskinson

The Druid

British bass-baritone Ossian Huskinson is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where he was one of the esteemed Bicentenary Scholars, studying there for four years with Mark Wildman and Iain Ledingham, before graduating in 2021.

An international artist, Ossian made his first debut abroad with Deutsche Oper Berlin, singing Pietro in Simon Boccanegra, and has gone on to sing with Opéra de Toulon (Seneca, L'incoronazione di Poppea) as well as the Verbier Festival (Simone, Gianni Schicchi, and Prince Gremin, Eugene Onegin) Now a member of the prestigious Jetter Parker Artists Programme at the Royal Ballet and Opera, his roles there have included: Angelotti (Tosca), Mandarin (Turandot), Wagner (Faust), and Marquis d'Obigny (La Traviata). He also sings Abimelech in their upcoming production of Samson et Dalila.

He is extremely grateful to Mascarade Opera Foundation for their continued support of his professional development.



Rachel Wise

Associate Director & Movement

Rachel was awarded 'Outstanding Young Creative Talent' from The Grange Festival 2023. She was a Junior Fellow Opera Director for Guildhall School of Speech and Drama. She studied her BA at Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and completed her MA Movement Directing and Teaching, at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Opera credits include: Glyndebourne; London Handel Festival; The Grange Festival; Beijing Music Festival; Welsh National Opera; Nevill Holt Opera; English Touring Opera.

Rachel works across Theatre, Opera and Film, she is currently producing and directing a documentary film about the UK Arts funded by AHRC.



Sheffield City Morris

The Dancers

Sheffield City Morris are a mixed gender Cotswold Morris side. Celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, they have performed in folk festivals across the country in a variety of traditional styles, including their self-created 'Medup' tradition, which was made to be danced in cities and urban areas. Recognisable in the Morris world for their precise movements, flowing stepping and trademark green trousers, they are thrilled to be joining the cast of The Devil's Den.