



Sarah Richmond as Lucrece in rehearsal for *What Happened to Lucrece* by Andrew Synnott at Wexford Festival Opera 2020

Wexford teams up with RTÉ to spread its magic nationwide



Dick O'Riordan

This is no ordinary year, but luckily autumn is in its usual place and that's when opera fans focus on one thing: Wexford Festival Opera. It hasn't gone away, you know, not by a long shot. What's more, all of Ireland has the chance of getting a full blast of what it's all about.

In fact, the pandemic has created a situation that will allow the sheer magic of one of Ireland's leading cultural treasures to be experienced at home, through WTO merging forces with RTÉ to screen online opera into homes across the country and internationally.

"It may not be its normal magical self, but there will be loads of enchantment, and the prospect of so many people experiencing the festival for the first time is particularly exciting," says chief executive David McLoughlin.

"Wexford has faced many challenges over its long history – it is now in its 69th year! Yes, we were downhearted when audiences were ruled out, but we remain upbeat about the wonderful operatic brew that has been planned by our artistic director Rosetta Cecchi. This will be served up in style as a result of our free-to-view collaborative partnership with RTÉ."

"We are also delighted to be teaming up once again with the ARTE Opera Season, one of Europe's most exciting opera festivals which will open the WTO programme on Oc-

tober 11 with a Rossini work, which will be performed on the stage of the National Opera House and dedicated to the memory of victims of Covid-19," said McLoughlin.

The festival timeline

Open, Sunday, October 11

A performance of his original version of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, considered one of his masterly works and full of memorable melodies and rhythmic vitality. The orchestra of two pianos, harmonium, four soloists and chorus will be conducted by Kenneth Montgomery with piano instrumentalists Pughin Collins and Carmen Santos, Andrew Synnott (harmonium) and soloists Claudia Boyle and Tara Eiraught, tenor Pietro Adami, bass John Molloy and the newly formed Wexford Factory Ensemble, which will be making its festival debut.

This production is also being live streamed by the Strasbourg-based European Cultural Channel, ARTE Opera, as part of its digital opera season. It will be available for one year on arte.tv/opera.

Open, October 12

Leading Irish soprano Celine Byrne will perform operatic favourites in a recital from the WTO stage. Strangely, Byrne has not yet appeared in a Wexford opera, so expect her to stamp her true class here.

Open, October 12-17

Six days with an episode each day of Verdi's *Falstaff*. Chronicles will be performed by the Wexford Factory, the members of which have just come through an intensive and exciting week of master classes with Juan Diego Florez and Celine Byrne. It tells the story of how Shakespeare's salacious old rogue tries to reduce two wealthy married ladies to gain access to their husbands' loot.

Open, October 12, 14 and 16

Music journalist and critic Michael Dervan interviews three

international artists to discuss the past, present and future of opera: world-acclaimed Albanian soprano Ermirë Jaha, who made a huge impression in her Wexford debut in 2006; Graham Vick, artistic director of Birmingham Opera Company, whose pioneering work has brought him to the attention of major opera houses and institutions worldwide; and conductor Antonio Pappano, who has helped develop opera through his skills as a broadcaster and television personality.

October 12-15

Irish composer and artist in residence Andrew Synnott's new work is based on Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece* about the tragic end of a Roman noblewoman. Titled *What Happened to Lucrece*, it will be performed over three separate evenings, each performance presenting a different ending, one farcical, one tragic and one romantic. Viewers are invited to vote on their favourite.

Open, Friday, October 16

A vast collection of world stars, all of whom sang at Wexford before they became internationally known, will treat viewers to special aria performances from their own homes. Mary Whelan of Lyric FM will be guiding them through what should be a spectacular evening. They include tenors Juan Diego Florez and Joseph Calleja, soprano Helena Dix, mezzo-soprano Nora Sauterstein and baritone Roberto de Candia.

Open, Sunday, October 18

Described last year as "the hottest soprano in America", Lucette O'pessa is one of the most in-demand lyric coloratura today and her performance from the National Opera House will bring the curtain down on what promises to be a stunning end to a different, yet dynamic, festival.

The screenings take place at 8 p.m. culture, and you can catch up on RTÉ Player and its exclusive WTO pop-up channel.