



Thursday 29 September, 8pm
St George's Church

**Francesca Caccini's *Ruggiero*
Or *The Liberation of Ruggiero from the Island of Alcina*
From 1625 (via 1902)**

**A Brighton Early Music Festival BREMF Early Opera production
A Music and Theatre for All Film directed by Thomas Guthrie**

Deborah Roberts and Oliver Webber *musical directors*
Claire Williams *continuo lead*

Angela Hicks *soprano* Alcina
Kieran White *tenor* Ruggiero
Anna Bachleitner *soprano* Melissa / Nunzia
Elspeth Piggott *soprano* Sirena / 1st Water Deity
Kat Carson *soprano* 1st Damigella
Kristiina Watt *soprano* 2nd Damigella
Luthien Brackett *mezzo-soprano* 3rd Damigella / Female Monster
Marcella Di Garbo *soprano* 2nd Water Deity / Female Plant / Formerly Enchanted Lady
Peter Martin *tenor* Fiume Vistola / Pastore / Astolfo
Toshi Ogita *tenor* Male Plant / 3rd Water Deity
Stuart O'Hara *bass-baritone* Male Monster

BREMF Early Opera Orchestra

Oliver Webber *violin 1*
Marguerite Wassermann *violin 2*
Olwen Foulkes *violin 3, recorder*
Iain Hall *cello, tenor viol, recorder*
Harry Buckoke *bass viol, lirone*
Jacob Garside *bass viol*
Isaline Leloup *violone*

Aileen Henry *harp*
Kristiina Watt *chitarraone*
Eric Thomas *chitarraone*
Claire Williams *harpsichord, chamber organ*
Members of **The English Cornett & Sackbut
Ensemble**: Emily White, Peter Thornton, Tom Lees,
Adrian France *sackbuts*

Film directed and edited by **Thomas Guthrie** with drawings by **Ruth Paton** animated by **Alex Smith**
Sound, cameras and videography by **Anthony Hutchings** and **Tommy Hutchings** for **Silver Appleyard
Productions**

Set and lighting by **Natalie Rowland**, **Mark Rowland** and **Pitch Black mobile stage**
Costumes designed by **Ruth Paton** and supplied by **Gladrags Community Costume Resource**

The project

Premiered in 1625, *La liberazione di Ruggiero* is the first known opera by a female composer – a humorous and witty work with choruses of enchanted plants, monsters, exotic ladies and sea gods, a good and an evil sorceress and a rather easily seduced 'hero'. Brighton Early Music Festival's previous production of *Ruggiero* at The Old Market was one of The Guardian's top ten operatic events of 2015.

In the summer of 2021, BREMF revisited *Ruggiero* with a talented cast of young and upcoming singers and players. The opera was the subject of a study course and filming project working under the inspiring direction of Thomas Guthrie, who set the fantasy world of this early opera in the world of the equally fantastical early film pioneer and illusionist Georges Méliès. Blending modern techniques, such as green screen technology, with hand drawn backdrops and animation, this film captures the pioneering spirit of the early filmmakers, while also hinting at the stage machinery and effects developed in the early 17th century at the birth of opera.

Deborah Roberts

The creatives

Deborah Roberts was born in Europe and graduated from Nottingham University with an MA in editing and interpreting renaissance and baroque music. She has remained fascinated by the discovery of new repertoire and performance styles ever since. As a long-term former member of The Tallis Scholars, Deborah performed with them in over 1,200 concerts in many weird and wonderful places around the world and in countless recordings of rare and beautiful renaissance music. She also sang with many other early music ensembles as a soloist and consort singer.

She took up choral direction 20 years ago, and enjoys running courses in sacred polyphony and early opera. In 2002 she co-founded Brighton Early Music Festival with Clare Norburn and remains its artistic director.

Oliver Webber's rather obscure musical interests range from the construction of historical gut strings to the metrical analysis of old Italian poetry, with stops along the way to include ornamentation, historical bow- and violin-holds, and rhetoric. With his ensemble, Monteverdi String Band, he has explored many of these interests through intriguing programmes involving ornamented madrigals, swordsmanship and (memorably!) the reconstruction of Galileo's experiments on acceleration to the accompaniment of a pair of lutes.

He has been a regular visitor to BREMF over the years, immersing himself in opera productions of Monteverdi, Blow, Gagliano and – back in 2015 – Francesca Caccini's *La liberazione di Ruggiero*. The collaborative way of working that has evolved with the BREMF team, in which playing, singing and acting are all understood to be working towards the same goal of touching the hearts and minds of the audience, has been a source of great inspiration, and it is a particular pleasure to revisit *Ruggiero* with everything we've learned from each other, and from the music and literature, over the last few years.

monteverdistringband.com

Thomas Guthrie is an innovative and award-winning British director and musician working in theatre and music to tell stories in vivid, new and direct ways.

A former Jette Parker Young Artist Stage Director at the Royal Opera House in London, his revival of David McVicar's *Die Zauberflöte* there won What's On Stage Best Revival 2018. His own critically acclaimed productions of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Die Zauberflöte* at Longborough Festival Opera led to an invitation to direct Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* there in 2018 (subsequently called 'one of the best productions at this venue I have seen', Rupert Christiansen, *Telegraph*). He directed Verdi's *Aida* at the Liceu in 2020, and his production of Marco da Gagliano's rare 1608 opera *La Dafne* – created in a week with young singers at Brighton Early Music Festival – was nominated for a 2020 RPS Award.

Thomas also works with non-professionals of all ages and backgrounds. Some of his most thrilling projects have been in this field, including work with Streetwise Opera, the Prison Choir Project, the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, and the Royal Opera House, through whom he has inspired hundreds to connect with their inner Caruso and raise the roof. Thomas is the founder and artistic director of the charity Music and Theatre for All, former Guest Artistic Advisor to the York Early Music Festival, was Belknap Fellow at Princeton University, New Jersey in 2017, and is proud to sing and play with Bjarte Eike's Alehouse Boys.

thomasguthrie.com

Originally from Bath, **Claire Williams** studied piano and early keyboards at the Royal College of Music in London. She subsequently completed a Master's degree at Trinity College of Music, studying harpsichord and chamber organ with James Johnstone. From 2016 she held the Fellowship in Harpsichord/Continuo at the Royal College of Music for three consecutive years – the first person ever to do so.

Claire is much in demand as a continuo player and accompanist, and can occasionally be persuaded to give a solo recital. However, she feels most at home when playing as part of a group, and enjoys working with a wide and varied range of ensembles. She has performed in venues ranging from the intimacy of the Handel & Hendrix museum in London, to the expansive Royal Albert Hall, and everything in between. Claire first became involved with BREMF as a student on the Early Music Live! Scheme in 2008 and has been a familiar face there ever since.

clairewilliams.co.uk

The performers

Space here alas does not permit the inclusion of biographies for all of our wonderful young artists, but you can find out more by clicking their names on the first page of the digital programme and following the hyperlinks to their websites where available.

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