



MIDWALES OPERA  
OPERA CANOLBARTH CYMRU

## About the company:

Mid Wales Opera has at its core a belief in bringing the very best opera in accessible, entertaining and high quality productions to theatres across the country, offering many people their only opportunity to experience the “real thing” in a venue close to home. We perform in English, to increase accessibility and intensify the audience experience of the drama. Over the past 23 years the company has established an outstanding reputation for touring high quality, fully staged, professional opera to small and medium scale venues across Wales and England.

**Our Mission Statement:** to bring opera of the highest standards to places which otherwise do not have access to it, thus reaching new audiences of all ages and enhancing the accessibility of live opera performance to those who already love it; and to offer opportunities to professional singers early in their career to master major roles, working from the base of Mid Wales.

Year after year, venue managers across England and Wales ask us back so that they can offer their audiences something really unique: a truly operatic experience in an intimate and accessible setting. The on-going support we receive from the Arts Councils of Wales and England is testament to the need for our work, as well as to its quality and our competence in delivery.

**History:** Mid Wales Opera was founded in 1988 by Barbara McGuire and Keith Darlington as a Summer Opera School. It rapidly expanded into an annual Festival of Opera at Newtown’s Theatr Hafren, mounting two full-scale productions, using a mixture of professional, student and local amateur resources.

In 1990, the Welsh Arts Council (now Arts Council Wales) funded the Company’s first tour to venues in Wales, performing one of the two Festival operas accompanied by a small orchestral ensemble. Between 1997 and 1999, the Company received generous annual lottery funding, enabling it to mount the first full-scale production for 30 years in Wales of Verdi’s *Aida*, followed by Puccini’s *Turandot* and Gounod’s *Faust*. Since 2000, financial constraints have meant the company has concentrated on one annual fully professional production (with soloists and a small Chamber Orchestra of ten musicians and a Conductor) commencing with three Festival performances in Newtown and followed by a national tour, building up to around 30 performances in total in recent years (around 10 in Wales and 17 or so in England).

**Staffing:** In 2007, Barbara McGuire retired as General Manager and Michael Penn was appointed as General Manager on a part-time basis. Keith Darlington retired as Artistic/Musical Director (and conductor of all the company’s performances) at the end of the 2009 tour. Nicholas Cleobury was appointed as his successor and formally took over the post on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009: his first tour, Verdi’s *Falstaff* was a great critical and popular success. Following a review of staffing structure during the Spring of 2011, the position of Executive Director was created and Rachel Dominy was appointed in July 2011. Mike continues to work with the company as General Manager, and the position of Artistic Administrator is being created to support them. Bridget Wallbank has worked with the company since its earliest days as Production Manager: she has recently undertaken a good deal of the administration work for the company, and will continue, along with her duties as Production Manager, to fulfil the role of Finance Administrator.

**Funding:** We are a Revenue Funded Organisation of ACW and receive annual Grants for the Arts funding from Arts Council England to support our performances in English venues. Following the Arts Council of Wales' Investment Review our revenue funding increased from £46,000 to £104,000 annually for the period to 2013/14. ACW recognises that the company has achieved exceptional results and that we continue to play a vital part in complementing other opera provision in Wales by presenting fully-staged performances of mainstream works in smaller venues, thus making this most complex (and expensive) of art forms accessible in a way other companies are not able to do.

We also receive regular support from local authorities (such as Powys County Council and Ceredigion County Council), from local/national sponsors (such as from Emerson and OldBell3 Ltd), from our Friends organisation and from trusts and foundations (such as the Ashley Family Foundation and the John Lewis Foundation).

**Productions:** Each year we commission a new production from a professional directorial team. The Company pursues a policy of alternating innovative productions of mainstream opera with less frequently performed works: thus, 2009's tour was of *The Marriage of Figaro*, followed in 2010 by *Falstaff* and in 2011 by *Madam Butterfly*. Our productions are generally exceptionally well received by audiences and critics and last year our production of *Falstaff* won a place in The Daily Telegraph's Top 10 Operas of 2010 for Best Team Effort. In 2012 we will be presenting a new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* directed by Martin Lloyd Evans and conducted by Nicholas Cleobury.

**Touring:** in 2011 we toured to 25 venues across England and Wales, giving a total of 30 performances of *Madam Butterfly*. We generally perform for one night in each venue, with the exception of our home base – Theatr Hafren – where we do a run of performances to open the tour, and certain select venues in England, including the Ludlow Assembly Rooms and The Medina Theatre on the Isle of Wight. In 2012 we are aiming for a minimum of 25 performances and as well as those already mentioned venues include Buxton Opera House, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Hereford Courtyard, Theatre Royal Margate, Theatr Brycheiniog, The Torch Milford Haven etc.

**Cast and orchestra:** Mid Wales Opera has a firm belief in offering opportunities to young artists to develop their skills, knowledge and experience in an intimate yet highly professional environment. Internationally known singers who have undertaken some of their first major roles with MWO include Peter Auty, Neal Davies, Christopher Maltman, Gail Pearson and Mary Plazas. We place an emphasis on promoting Welsh singers such as Katherine Allen, Sion Goronwy, Wyn Pencarreg, Camilla Roberts and in 2011 tenor John Pierce.

In 2012, we are working with an exciting cast of young professionals, several at the very earliest stages of their career – embarking on their first major roles since completing their studies. In addition to this we have secured additional funding to enable us to work with two further young singers as understudies, with a trainee assistant director, conductor and stage manager. We aim to deliver two additional performances on tour as schools performances and we hope to offer performing opportunities to members of this "cover company".

The Mid Wales Opera Chamber Orchestra is made up of freelance professional instrumentalists, many of whom have worked with us for many years. Generally we tour with a band of at least 10 players. Along with cast and crew, it means a touring company on the road of around 25 people.

**Where next?** It is an exciting time to be joining MWO, with our plans for the future rapidly taking shape, along with a new staffing structure to support them. This is a real opportunity to make a difference, to experience the whole spectrum of life in a touring opera company and to develop new skills, meet new people and visit new places!