

Opera Up Close presents the British Premiere of the one act opera

Médée

Music by Darius Milhaud. Libretto by Madeleine Milhaud.

Directed by Russell Plows. Musical Direction by Steve Dummer. Sung in French with English captions.

Cast includes: Pamela Hay. Juwon Ogungbe. Christopher Ovenden. Miranda Westcott. Helen Whittington.

Medea, having secured Jason the Golden Fleece, has made herself an outcast by destroying his enemies and murdering her brother for his sake. In exile in Corinth, Jason decides to abandon Medea and marry King Creon's daughter Creuse and secure the future of his sons. Creon banishes Medea who retaliates by using magic to destroy Creuse. Realising that her children may be used against her, and to further punish Jason's betrayal, she kills their two sons and escapes in a winged chariot.

Following Russell Plows' "skilful" and "effective" (*Evening Standard*) production of Ullmann's *The Kaiser of Atlantis*, Opera Up Close presents Darius Milhaud's opera *Médée*, a pacy, hour-long adaptation of Seneca by the composer's wife, Madeleine, who is now over 100 years old. Written in 1939, *Médée* contains some of Milhaud's most lyrical and imaginative music including the beautiful aria "Chers Corinthiens" and furious, energetic choruses. The opera reaches its climax in the scenes in which Medea destroys her rival and her children. Only spoken about in Euripides, Madeleine Milhaud brings these terrifying events onstage to Milhaud's memorably dark and disturbing music. *Médée* is performed in French with English captions in a specially prepared new chamber version for harp and strings.

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) was one of the most prolific composers of the 20th century. He studied in Paris under Charles Widor and Vincent d'Indy. He discovered jazz on a trip to the United States in 1922, emigrating there in 1940. His compositions are particularly noted as being influenced by jazz and for their use of polytonality. His noted works include *Christophe Colomb* (opera) *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* (ballet), *La Création du Monde* (jazz), and *Notes Without Music* (an autobiography). Notable students of Milhaud include Dave Brubeck, Burt Bacharach and Steve Reich.

The cast includes **Miranda Westcott** who won acclaim for her performance in Russell Plows' production of *The Kaiser of Atlantis* - "The most assertive and confident performance came from Miranda Westcott as the Drummer, her role as sexy vamp being complemented by the richness of her voice, especially in the slow passages placed high in her range." *Opera*; **Helen Whittington** who trained as a contemporary dancer and then as a singer at Guildhall School of Music and Drama - her roles include Fiordiligi (*Così fan Tutte*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*) and Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*); and **Pamela Hay** who has worked with Houston Grand Opera, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Opera Della Luna, Carl Rosa Opera Company, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, and was described as 'impressive' by the *Evening Standard* and "tender and touching" by *Opera Magazine*.

Director **Russell Plows** has worked with Welsh National Opera, Wexford Festival Opera and English Touring Opera and has directed work including *La Bohème*, *Così Fan Tutte* and *Don Giovanni* for the Trinity College of Music, Royal Sutton Opera and Hampstead Garden Opera. He is a founder member of Opera Up Close for whom he directed *The Kaiser of Atlantis*. Musical Director **Stephen Dummer** originally trained as a clarinettist under Jack Brymer at the Guildhall School in London and subsequently as a conductor, studying at the Royal College of Music under Christopher Adey and Edwin Roxburgh. He has been described by the French conductor Diego Masson as "one of the best young conductors I have ever met".

www.operaupclose.com

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Sunday, May 29th and Monday May 30th 2005; Sunday, June 5th and Monday, June 6th 2005; and
Sunday, June 12th and Monday, June 13th 2005

Evenings at 8.00pm. Tickets £12, £9 concessions. Performance Length: Approximately 1 hour.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

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