

The Boatswain's Mate

Music and Libretto by Ethel Smyth. Based on a Story by W.W. Jacobs.

Directed by Tom Littler. Produced by Primavera in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

the **finboroughgaeties** – Celebrating British Music Theatre series continues with the comic opera by Dame Ethel Smyth, composer and suffragette, and widely regarded as the first female opera composer.

The first production in Primavera's three-month residency at the Finborough Theatre, *The Boatswain's Mate* will be a fully costumed production-without-décor, opening on 17 June for five Sunday and Monday performances as part of the multi-award-winning Finborough Theatre's [**rediscoveries** season 2007] and their acclaimed sell-out the **finboroughgaeties** – Celebrating British Music Theatre series.

Written in 1914 and unseen in London for more than 50 years, *The Boatswain's Mate* is Smyth's fourth and most obviously feminist opera. A witty and inventive battle of the sexes, it features a feisty heroine – supposedly based on Emmeline Pankhurst – who outwits her suitors in a series of entertaining and resourceful deceptions. Mrs Waters is a wealthy widow whose first husband has left her with a country pub and a determination never to remarry. When the retired boatswain George Benn devises a scheme to win her hand by 'saving' her from a burglar whom he has in fact paid to break in, he reckons without her bravery and quick-wittedness.

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) was born to a strict military family in which she was introduced to music and composition as ladylike activities suited to her position in society. As a teenager, however, she became determined to pursue music as a career and went on a prolonged hunger-strike to persuade her formidable father to allow her to study in Leipzig. Her operas included *Fantasio* and *The Wreckers*, and she also found success with orchestral and choral works such as her enduringly popular *Mass in D* (1891) – as well as providing the anthem for the suffragette movement, *The March of the Women*. A prominent suffragette, Smyth met and fell in love with Emmeline Pankhurst (buried next to the Finborough Theatre in Brompton Cemetery) in 1910 and dedicated two years to the suffragette movement as political activist and its unofficial composer. She spent several weeks imprisoned in Holloway for the cause, during which she conducted a famous performance of *The March of the Women* with her toothbrush! Later in life, Smyth fought for political causes such as a subsidized national opera for England and the rights of female orchestral musicians. In 1922, she became a D.B.E.

Director **Tom Littler** is directing three rediscoveries at the Finborough Theatre this Summer including Henry Hubert Davies' *The Mollusc* and T.S. Eliot's *The Confidential Clerk*. He has directed over twenty productions including Stephen Sondheim's *Passion* (Edinburgh Festival 2006 – *The Scotsman* Critics' Choice), *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Into the Woods* (Oxford Playhouse), and Frank McGuinness' version of *A Doll's House* (Tour). He is currently Assistant Director to Alan Strachan on *The Letter* (Wyndham's) and to Laurence Boswell on *Treats* (Garick). He is also Peter Hall's Assistant Director on *Little Nell* (Theatre Royal Bath) and later this year will staff direct the international tour of the Chichester Festival Theatre production of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Tom is Artistic Director of Primavera and is currently directing Primavera's *Forgotten Classics* series at the King's Head. Primavera was founded in 2003 and focuses on producing revivals, particularly of plays that are unacknowledged and underperformed masterpieces. **www.primavera productions.com**

Previous **finboroughgaeties** productions have included *Florodora*, *Our Miss Gibbs*, *The Maid of the Mountains*, and *A "Gilbert and Sullivan" Double Bill*. All the productions have completely sold out and won much critical acclaim. In 2003, the Finborough also presented *The Women's War – A Centenary Celebration*, an evening of original suffragette drama.

PRESS NIGHT: MONDAY, 18 JUNE 2007 AT 8PM

PHOTOCALL: By arrangement. Please email admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk

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Box Office 0870 4000 838 Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Sunday, 17 June and Monday 18 June; Sunday, 24 June 2007; Sunday, 1 July and Monday, 2 July 2007

Evenings at 8.00pm. Tickets £11, £9 concessions.

Performance Length: Approximately 1 hour 40 minutes (including interval)

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Neil McPherson on e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07977 173135**

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