

Press Release
30 April 2018



OPERA
NORTH

AEONS: A SOUND WALK ALONG THE RIVER TYNE FOR THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF THE NORTH

Aeons, a new sound walk commissioned by **Opera North**, will take audiences on a musical journey along the banks of the Tyne and back through the ages in the centre of Newcastle this summer as part of the **Great Exhibition of the North 2018**. Free tickets are available to book from today.

The work of **Martin Green** of the visionary folk trio Lau, featuring the vocals of Ryton's own **Becky Unthank** (The Unthanks), Mogwai's **Dominic Aitchison**, the massed forces of the **Chorus and Orchestra of Opera North** and field recordings made along the river, **Aeons** is an epic, original piece of music designed to be heard through headphones during a half-hour walk along Hadrian's Wall Path.

Aeons is supported by National Lottery players through funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which is supporting a number of elements of the Great Exhibition of the North 2018.

Having collected their headsets at Gateshead Millennium Bridge on the North Bank, walkers will step into a unique sonic adventure, immersed in a musical world that evolves by means of hidden 'triggers' as they move through the physical landscape, under six historic bridges and out to the western fringes of the city centre.

From a single singing voice to the full might and main of the Opera North ensembles, from the Quayside with its medieval remnants, past the site of the Roman and Old Tyne Bridges now occupied by the Victorian Swing Bridge, under Stephenson's magnificent High Level Bridge to the sweeping

concrete spans of the Redheugh, *Aeons* promises an intense, personal experience of the river as a place of imagination, a place of wonder and constant change. Recordings made with a state-of-the-art binaural head – an artificial human head with microphones fitted inside the ears – will create a stunning illusion of 3D sound.

Composer Martin Green comments:

“We often think of music as the soundtrack to our lives. Well, this half hour of it has been tailor-made according to our changing surroundings as we follow the River Tyne past the vestiges of centuries of human history, and back into deep geological time.

“As a composer, I’ve never had this degree of control over how people actually listen to the music before. In concerts the room and the amplification system are different every time, and people sit in different places in the room anyway; and even on record people listen on all sorts of different devices and speakers.

*“With *Aeons* though, we have made bespoke music for the specific headphones everyone will be wearing. This gives me a freedom I’ve never had before, to make tiny sounds and place them right next to the listener, or to come up in the centre of a 32-strong chorus, and hear those singers from every direction. The field recordings, painstakingly made in true binaural sound on Hadrian’s Wall Path, add another, extraordinary sonic dimension.*

*“Working with the dexterous might of the Orchestra and Chorus of Opera North has been a joyous experience. And who better to celebrate the North East than Becky Unthank, who has graced *Aeons* with her matchless vocals and her incredible knowledge of traditional song.”*

Jo Nockels, Projects Manager, Opera North, comments:

"As England’s national opera company in the North, we were delighted to be invited to participate in the Great Exhibition’s celebration of our region.

*"*Aeons* is a pan-Northern endeavour, both in terms of the artists we are working with and the locations that are incorporated in the finished sound walk: Becky Unthank’s breathtaking vocals were recorded in a former church in Northumberland; the awesome sound of the Orchestra and Chorus of Opera North was captured in Leeds Town Hall; and Martin Green and sound recordist Mike Winship have been making eerie binaural recordings along the River Tyne itself.*

"We started this project thinking about the saying: ‘No-one ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and they are not the same person.’ Martin’s immersive and completely absorbing

soundtrack to the River Tyne takes flight from that phrase, transforming the listener's relationship with the route of the walk along the river's edge".

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, comments:

"The Great Exhibition of the North is an unrivalled opportunity to shine the spotlight on the North of England's incredible heritage and we're delighted that money raised by National Lottery players is going to have such a big impact for millions of visitors to the event this year."

"Aeons will be a fantastic part of the exhibition, a truly interactive way to experience the heritage on our doorstep."

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, **Aeons** will open as part of the spectacular Get North! opening event on **Friday 22 June** at the Great Exhibition of the North's **Quayside Hub**, which also includes the Get North Water Sculpture, the UK's largest water at 80m long and the height of the Tyne Bridge, that will perform to a soundtrack of three specially commissioned music compositions. Walks will run at 10am, 11.30am, 1.00pm and 2.30pm each day from **Monday to Saturday until Friday 7 September** (excluding Monday 23 July and Monday 20 August). Tickets are free but booking via **getnorth2018.com** is essential.

Great Exhibition of the North is a free, 80-day Exhibition which takes place between 22 June and 9 September 2018 across NewcastleGateshead, celebrating great art and culture, design and innovation from across the North. For more information on the full programme visit www.getnorth2018.com

Credits

Composer, accordion, electronics: Martin Green

Orchestral and Choral Arrangements: Benjamin Woodgates

Vocals: Becky Unthank

Bass guitar: Dominic Aitchison

with the Orchestra and Chorus of Opera North

Conductor: Hugh Brunt

Binaural recordings: Mike Winship

Producer: Calum Malcolm

Technical Manager, Orchestral and Choral Recording: Jamie Saye

For Opera North:

Producer: Jo Nockels

Assistant Producer: Kathryn Gasic

Production Manager: Jane Earnshaw

For the Great Exhibition of the North:

Producer: Marian Chapman

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Notes to Editors

Opera North

[Opera North](#) is England's national opera company in the North and one of Europe's leading arts organisations. Opera North is a vibrant, lively organisation which actively challenges conventional perceptions of opera. Breathing new life into the classics, the Company is also a strong advocate of lesser-known works and a champion of musical theatre.

Opera North Projects

The work of [Opera North Projects](#) crosses conventional boundaries, bringing classical and contemporary arts together in an eclectic year-round programme of performance, visual arts commissions, literary events and artistic development. Projects take apart the elements of opera: words, music, visual arts and theatre, and put them back together in new ways.

Opera North Projects produces small-scale touring shows, site specific performance and commissions, together with a rolling programme of artistic residencies. 'Home' is the beautifully restored Howard Assembly Room in Leeds, a captivating and flexible performance space whose public programme is curated by the Projects Department.

Work often has an emphasis on collaboration, with recent partners including The Royal Shakespeare Company, the Manchester International Festival, Kneehigh Theatre, The Opera Group, The Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Hull UK City of Culture 2017 and Leeds International Festival

Great Exhibition of the North 2018

- In October 2016, NewcastleGateshead was selected to host Great Exhibition of the North; NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) led the bid and is the lead delivery partner for the Exhibition, working closely with colleagues at Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Sage Gateshead, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and a board chaired by Sir Gary Verity.
- Towns and cities across the North of England are getting involved by being part of the 'Inspired by' programme of events, experiences and performances. People can submit details of their event at www.getnorth2018.com/inspiredby.
- Great Exhibition of the North is encouraging schools to get involved, with content available on the website to both download teaching resources and upload their responses. Schools are able to do follow up work developed in the classroom by booking a tailored visit to the Exhibition during the final four weeks of the summer term.
- Great Exhibition of the North will provide a range of exciting volunteer opportunities for individuals, groups and businesses. A team of over 1,000 volunteers will welcome visitors to NewcastleGateshead, interpreting themes of exhibition, lead school groups and provide event support at special one-off occasions. Applications are now open, training will be 15 hours from now until June and each volunteer will need to commit to 40 hours from 22 June to 09 September 2018.
- On Tuesday 27 February the BBC announced a partnership to support Great Exhibition of the North.
- Great Exhibition of the North is supported by Premier Partners Virgin Trains and Accenture.
- Funding has also been secured via Arts Council England's Ambition for Excellence, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Innovate UK, VisitBritain, the Sir James Knott Trust and Reece Foundation and by England European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020.
- Womble Bond Dickinson, Ward Hadaway, Siemens, Port of Tyne and CISCO are proud partners of Great Exhibition of the North.
- Newcastle Airport, Greggs, Go North East, Tyne & Wear Metro and Northumbrian Water are supporting partners.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, the Heritage Lottery Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife.

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