



Handpicked  
Productions

# THE PROMISE

“I HELD A FOREST IN  
MY ARMS AND MY  
HEART WAS  
CHANGED...”

A new opera by Daniel Saleeb & Nicola Davies,  
conceived by Lucy Bradley

Based on the book *The Promise* © Nicola Davies and Laura Carlin.  
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## ABOUT THE PROMISE

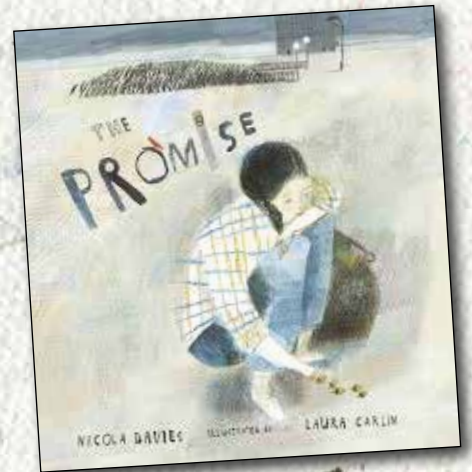
Based on Nicola Davies' celebrated book, our opera is centred on communities and the transformative power of cultivating and nurturing green spaces, especially in urban environments; it encourages and creates opportunities for our audiences to take positive action on the climate crisis, to build resilience and a connection to nature which will continue long beyond our project.

## “GREEN SPREAD THROUGH THE CITY LIKE A SONG...”

At its heart *The Promise*, is the story of a young girl who is lost in a cold city; her life, and that of the community around her is transformed when she unwittingly makes a promise to plant seeds. This unexpected promise to plant is central to our production, which asks its audiences, like the girl in the story, to make their own promise to plant. Part opera, part environmental event, *The Promise*, will curate a space for social change, encouraging its audience to come together to take personal and collective action on the climate crisis. With its simple story about a lost girl who finds herself, *The Promise* leaps naturally into Operatic adaptation; her transformation and that of the city and people surrounding her will speak powerfully through musical development, her growth and the blossoming of nature mirrored perfectly in Daniel Saleeb's inventive and sensitive score.

## ABOUT HANDPICKED PRODUCTIONS

Taking a collaborative approach to bringing communities and artists together, Handpicked Productions develops work that provides the opportunity for participants and audiences to play, experiment and experience highest quality cultural activity. We aim to increase access to and engagement in the arts and the environment with positive outcomes for individuals and communities. Building on successful R&D periods in 2021 and 2022, we are now developing *The Promise* for tour in 2023.



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

[handpickedproductions.org](http://handpickedproductions.org)

## AUDIENCE

This imaginative and inclusive piece for children aged 5+ and their families, will be presented outdoors in specially created performances in partnership with venues and festivals around the UK, from beautiful rural settings, to urban inner city locations, ensuring an equality of access for all. We are working with an access advisor to ensure that access for all is prioritised in the planning and delivery of our outdoor opera, we want to ensure it is as inclusive and accessible an experience as possible for all audience members.

Our project will prioritise sustainable theatre practices, following the Theatre Green Book, and in the aftermath of the Covid crisis, our project offers a moment of beauty, connection and catharsis to its audience. With an energetic and ethnically diverse group of performers, a dynamic new composition by Daniel Saleeb, colourful puppets, and the environmental theme at its heart, our production offers families an opportunity to come together through the power of music, to celebrate resilience and new beginnings, to feel inspired and moved to act.



## CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM

Composer	Daniel Saleeb
Librettist	Nicola Davies
Director	Lucy Bradley
Designers	Ruth Paton & Sascha Gilmour
Dramaturg	Zoë Palmer
Company Director & Co-Producer	Anne Timpson
Co-Producer	Tamzin Aitken
Production Manager	Vivienne Clavering
Access Advisor	Kate Lovell

## PLANTING DAYS: A LASTING LEGACY

The Promise is a story about planting seeds and growing, about the power of nature to heal, and our visceral needs to connect with the soil and each other. More than a story, it is a communal act of healing and love which leaves as its legacy a future forest and its custodians.

As part of our tour in Summer 2023 we will ask all our audiences to make a Promise of their own and invite them to join us for a planting day in the Autumn.

We are partnering with local environmental organisations in each area and nationally with the Community Forest Network to embed planting opportunities for our audiences around the UK as part of our tour in 2023.



We'd love you to watch this short film (5 mins) which we produced following our week of Research & Development at Wild Rumpus's woodland site in Cheshire in 2021.



## AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Being led by the young people we work with is at the core of our methodology and their input and creativity are vital in guiding our work. We are developing the piece alongside a programme of workshops with Keystage 2 children at schools in underserved communities in Cumbria, Holbeck (Leeds) & Tower Hamlets. These areas all score highly on multiple indices of deprivation. We have already led work to explore the themes of The Promise, to create original music with groups and to teach them parts of our opera. We have explored our connections with nature, and the climate crisis and we will continue to encourage and support schools to transform their outdoor spaces through planting.

In July 2022, as a culmination of the work undertaken this year, we hosted 'work-in-progress' performances of a small section of our opera for our partner schools. The children who attended were able to participate, to sing, and to receive our story and its message. Our method ensures that our young partners have a stake in and feel ownership of the finished production that will tour in 2023. We are excited to talk to our current and future partners about options for expanding this work with schools and communities to new areas around the UK.

## SUSTAINABILITY & LEGACY

The creation of The Promise is a reaction and solution to the Climate Crisis, so our method of creation & touring must reflect that. We are championing a sustainable approach to making and touring our work, following both the Theatre Green Book and a dedicated Sustainability Consultant to ensure all our work is delivered with as little impact on the planet as possible.






In Autumn 2022, we will host a series of Planting Events for the schools and communities we've been working with. Our creative planting days will provide a lasting legacy for the project in these areas, and will inform the planning of similar planting events around the country as part of our UK tour of the completed opera in 2023. We are partnering with the Community Forest Network, the Tower Hamlets Arboreal Team, Trees for Cities and Workington Nature Partnership to achieve this.

In his book *'From What Is to What If'*, Rob Hopkins writes,

*"at the heart of our work is the need for those around us to be able to imagine a better world.....If we can imagine it, it is so much more likely that we will put our energy into making it a reality."*

The Promise offers an opportunity for audiences to engage with that act of imagination, as catharsis and catalyst – to participate in an imagined future which could help to enact change towards a more positive, community focussed, greener reality. Our innovative, multi-disciplinary approach, ensures our planting work is as important as the production we tour, sharing a message and activating our audiences. Our planting partners are excited about the innovation of utilising story and song to support planting events (differing to their usual approach), which has the potential to inspire engagement. Through these partnerships we will ensure a legacy of trees planted, and a community of forest guardians invested in their local green spaces. Our in-school work to date has shown significant impact in engaging young people as future environmentalists encouraging them to make their own decisions and priorities for the future. It has also proven positive as an instigator for change within schools, encouraging new approaches to engaging with the climate crisis, and the transformation of school sites. We are excited to develop this further in the next stage of our project.

## OUR APPROACH TO ACCESS

-  Our approach to the tour is one which will ensure access in the widest sense.
-  We want to take our project to communities who have little experience of Opera, and who wouldn't usually encounter it.
-  Our piece and approach will be inclusive and we will consult widely to ensure that our production prioritises access for all within its creation and touring.
-  We will pioneer a touring model that empowers communities to feel a sense of ownership and agency in our work and engages new audiences, directly in their own local areas. We will embed ourselves in a location, enabling us to build relationships with individuals, schools and partner organisations so that as well as participating in our performance we can support planting work in the future.
-  Our performance will draw together its audience as a community, to sing, to play, to have fun and to collectively imagine a different future.

We believe that engagement in and access to the arts is transformative in how we see ourselves and our place in the world around us. As such, we are keen to work in partnership with venues and festivals to find cost effective ways of touring our production in order to ensure that no-one is excluded as a result of financial or social circumstance or disability.

## OUR EXISTING PARTNERS

Our current community partners include: Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service (THAMES), Cumbria Music Education Hub, Cumbria Community Foundation, Slung Low, Allerdale Borough Council, Pro Corda, Workington Nature Partnership, Mersey Forests and the Community Forest Trust. We have received additional funding from Arts Council England, Without Walls (Blueprint R&D Fund), Wild Rumpus, Hadfield Trust, and the Mila Charitable Organisation.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, WE WOULD LOVE TO TALK ABOUT HOW OUR PROJECT COULD WORK IN YOUR COMMUNITY. PLEASE GET IN TOUCH BY EMAIL -

CONTACT@HANDPICKEDPRODUCTIONS.ORG OR PHONE + 44 7377 405 857





### ANNE TIMPSON • COMPANY DIRECTOR & CO-PRODUCER

Anne is a producer who has worked in community and arts engagement in West Cumbria for 20 years. Her work increases access to cultural opportunities for communities and supports the growth of the local cultural infrastructure. She held roles at The National Trust, as Arts Development Officer for Copeland and Allerdale Borough Councils, Rosehill Theatre and Prism Arts before setting up Handpicked Productions. Examples of her producing work include *Brundibar*, *The Rattler* and *Snappy Operas* (all for Mahogany Opera & Rosehill Theatre), *Harbour Tales* with Storyteller Ian Douglas and Creative Connections (Rosehill Theatre), *Picture of Me* (Prism Arts), *Midsummer Dreaming* and *At Autumn's Mellowing* (Handpicked Productions), *Krankenhaus Festival* (Sea Power and Aerial).



### TAMZIN AITKEN • CO-PRODUCER

Tamzin is an award-winning producer with over 18 years' experience in opera, classical music and theatre. Her work spans strategic planning, fundraising, producing and dramaturgy. Following roles with the Royal Opera House, London Philharmonic Orchestra and English National Opera, she took the leap to develop her career as a freelance consultant. She has since worked with a wide range of organisations including BBC Young Composer, Wilton's Music Hall, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Southbank Centre, Intermusica Artists' Management, The National Student Drama Festival, Ensonglopedia, St. Endellion's Summer Festival, and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. At the height of the pandemic, she Executive Produced VOPERA's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* which went on to win the South Bank Sky Arts Award for Opera 2021 and the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Opera and Music Theatre 2021.



### LUCY BRADLEY • ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Lucy Bradley is a director working in the UK and Europe in settings ranging from regional theatres and drama schools to large-scale opera houses and site-specific locations including Royal Opera House, Opera North, Glyndebourne Festival, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Teatro Real, Madrid, Oper Köln and Opera Monte Carlo, The British Museum, The Brooklands Museum and The Corinthia Hotel. Participation has always played a large part in Lucy's work and she is passionately committed to the creation of new Opera and Theatre for and with young audiences.



### DANIEL SALEEB • COMPOSER

Daniel is a composer of wide-reaching and eclectic work, for the church, the concert platform, schools, film, theatre and opera. Recent performances of his commissions have included: Westminster Abbey; Milton Court Studio Theatre, the Victoria & Albert Museum, St. John's Smith Square, St. Paul's Cathedral and the BBC Proms. Following earlier study at Magdalen College, Oxford, and the Royal College of Music, Daniel graduated with Distinction from the MA in Opera Making & Writing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2017. He was generously supported by the Guildhall Scholarships fund and the Oak Foundation. In 2017- 18, he was a Fellow in Composition at the Guildhall.



### NICOLA DAVIES • ORIGINAL AUTHOR & LIBRETTIST

Celebrated children's author, Nicola Davies, originally trained as a zoologist and worked for several years as one of the original presenter's of the BBC's *Really Wild Show*. Nicola is known for her ability to introduce the natural world and its fascinating creatures to picture-book audiences. She has written over 80 books for children include *One Tiny Turtle*, *Wild about Dolphins*, *Bat Loves the Night*, *Ariki and the Island of Adventures*, *Brave and the Fox*, and *Grow: Secrets of Our DNA*.



### SASCHA GILMOUR • DESIGNER

Sascha Gilmour is a theatre designer, maker and puppeteer with a studio based in Cheshire. She creates work for plays, musicals, festivals, events and performance art. Working collaboratively, pushing boundaries and a focus on sustainability are at the core of her creative practice.



### RUTH PATON • DESIGNER

Ruth is a set and costume designer for theatre, opera and dance who trained at the Motley Theatre Design Course. Engagement, outreach and teaching forms part of Ruth's practice and she is a lead artist for the Learning and Participation departments at Garsington Opera, English National Opera and The Royal Opera House. Ruth has designed many Operas and music productions for companies across the UK and is also an associate artist at Blind Summit. Internationally, she has worked at the Barbican, Bregenz and Spoleto Festivals, Abu Dhabi National Theatre, Princeton and MIT universities.