

**Thomas Guthrie & Music and Theatre For All
present *Our Street*, an new urban opera with
Lewisham Creative Chorus on Saturday 20 July
at Catford Broadway Theatre**



Saturday 20 July, 19.30
Catford Broadway Theatre

OUR STREET

Gwyneth Herbert composer
Thomas Guthrie director, MD
Ruth Paton designer
Vicky Olusanya associate director
Maria Ghoumrassi choreographer

The Outcry Ensemble
Gwyneth Herbert Jazz Band
Endurance Steel Orchestra

Lewisham Creative Chorus
Thames Opera Company
Mind and Soul Choir
Vox Urbane Next Gen

Music and Theatre for all

'Determined to kidnap my mother, as well as find out what an urban opera actually is, I turned up to one of her performances. Our Street, it's called, devised by the Lewisham Creative Chorus – a group more diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and background than any West End production could dream of. These things make a difference. "Salus populi suprema lex esto" began the show – an unsettling

whisper from performers placed in the crowd. The wellbeing of the people is the highest law. Whispers became a chant, then morphed into one of the catchiest, most rousing songs I've ever heard. There were heart-stopping soloists, puppetry, poetry, snatches of Schubert. When my mother appeared centre stage, cradling a mannequin of a boy, clearly deeply moved, I burst into tears. I'd expected this to be sweet, but I hadn't expected it to actually be good.'

Rhik Samadder in the Observer

"There was genuine enthusiasm in the room both from performers and audience, in a way that captured a joyous sense of community I sometimes experience in the road where I live."

Thoroughly Good, April 2023



On **Saturday 20 July** at **Catford Broadway Theatre**, **Thomas Guthrie** and **Music and Theatre For All** present ***Our Street***, an urban opera composed by jazz singer **Gwyneth Herbert** with **Lewisham Creative Chorus (LCC)**. Guthrie and Herbert have devised a story with the participants that is close to their hearts - urban gentrification's erosion of a local community. Guthrie has pulled together stellar ensembles **Vox Urbane**, **Outcry Ensemble** and **Endurance Steel Orchestra** to work alongside the **LCC**, **Mind and Soul Choir** and **professional dancers and soloists**, including **ROH's James Cleverton**.

Our Street follows the arrival of a new girl to the community, now overshadowed by the ambitions of property developer and landowner of the Ravensbrook River basin. Lord Raven's lucrative investment scheme is a new luxury, high-rise urban development which will up-root the local residents, high street and market. But he has bitten off more than he bargained for when the locals fight back to preserve their community.

While directing the **Royal Opera House's Andrea Chenier**, preparing a new production of **Lucia di Lammermoor** at IF Opera (**23-31 Aug**) and touring with the **Alehouse Boys** including **The Edinburgh Festival (15 Aug)**, closer to home Guthrie runs the Lewisham Creative Chorus (LCC) bringing together local residents from the ages of 10 to 80.

The **Guardian** wrote about LCC, ***"There's something about performers who do it for connection and community that breaks me open with joy. They put real life on the stage more viscerally than professionals can."***

LCC started in 2022 – it is open to all, young and old with no audition. The Chorus meets every Saturday morning at the Fellowship Inn in Bellingham to rehearse with a highly-trained creative team directed by Guthrie.

Following on from their Schubert-inspired *The Stories we Tell Ourselves* presented by **Alexander Armstrong** at the World Heart Beat last year, LCC has embarked on their most ambitious project to date. With a 100-strong cast of professional and amateur performers with additional puppets, it will be a heart-warming union of raw and professional talent. Starring 80-year Indian-born Apu, 13 yr old Coco, and retired BT engineer 'What a voice' Mike, alongside professional singers and dancers, alongside a newly restored original 1930s organ, expect the iconic Catford Broadway Theatre's roof to be blown clean off.

As Guthrie explains:

"All storytelling is about community, wherever we experience it. It brings people together, educates, entertains, gives a sense of belonging, identity, self- and awareness of others. All music, all theatre is storytelling, and my musical and theatrical journey from childhood



to adulthood has been about discovering a kind of engagement that discovers connections through improvisation, spontaneity, collective collaboration and creativity."

"What shines through is the warmth in the originating idea – bringing Schubert to the heart of Lewisham, introducing one to the other with a firm handshake and a warm smile."

Thoroughly Good, April 2023

Music and Theatre For All

Music and Theatre For All (MTFA) is a charity focused on the goal of providing access to performing arts to people of all backgrounds.

Their objectives are:

- Storytelling in all its forms is essential to community and therefore vital for all of us, now and always
- Accessibility is an integral part of what makes things good
- Belief in the power of beauty, compassion, empathy and tolerance to change lives
- Working with imagination and energy to improve the reach, quality and accessibility of culture for everybody, offering elite cultural experiences without being elitist
- **The Hive**, a vision for a national network of multi-purpose performance venues that provide affordable access to the arts in a local setting.

"We urgently need to make usable, exciting spaces where storytelling and music-making can happen in accessible ways and where anyone can feel comfortable."

"My friends said what are you doing going to that high-falutin' place!?! But it was amazing. Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow. I was in floods of tears by the end. I just believed the puppet was alive every second, and the music was so beautiful. Now I get what it's all about. I felt I belonged."

Audience reaction to *Die schöne Müllerin*, Middle Temple Hall, 2021

Lewisham Creative Chorus

Inspired during the lockdowns of the early 2020s to re-assess his work and reconnect with a more authentic sense of storytelling, Guthrie sought - through the charity he founded, MTFA - to engage with his local community to create and celebrate the best quality music and theatre. After *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*, the charity launched Lewisham Urban Opera, based on experiences Guthrie had had while



leading the Royal Opera House's *Write an Opera* programme. It was devised and performed with local residents and jazz legend Gwyneth Herbert, among other top professionals, as part of the London Borough of Culture Celebrations in Lewisham 2022. Lewisham Creative Chorus is the legacy of this endeavour.

Thomas Guthrie



Thomas Guthrie is an innovative and award-winning British director and musician working in theatre and music to tell stories in vivid, new and direct ways.

A former Jette Parker Young Artist Stage Director at the Royal Opera House in London, his revival of David McVicar's *Die Zauberflöte* there won *What's On Stage Best Revival* 2018. His own critically-acclaimed productions of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Die Zauberflöte* at Longborough Festival Opera led to an invitation to direct Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* there in 2018 (subsequently called 'one of the best productions at this venue I have seen' by Rupert Christiansen in the Telegraph). He directed *Aida* at the Liceu in 2020, *Semele* in Paris, Rome, London and Barcelona in 2019 and his 2020 production of Gagliano's rare 1608 opera *La Dafne* - created in a week with young singers at the Brighton Early Music Festival - was nominated for a 2020 RPS Award.

With a reputation for stylish, unfussy, energetic, physical, and theatrical work, the clarity of the storytelling, the commitment of the performers and a pre-eminence of musical values are at the heart of his productions.

Tom also works with non-professionals of all ages and backgrounds. Some of his most thrilling projects have been in this field, including work with Streetwise Opera, the Prison Choir Project, the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, and the Royal Opera House, through whom he has inspired hundreds to connect with their inner Caruso and raise the roof. His production of *Ludd and Isis*, a new opera commissioned to launch the ROH's new Production Park in Thurrock, involving a cast of hundreds, including professionals and amateurs of all ages, was acclaimed as '*one of the Royal Opera House's grandest achievements*' (Opera).

Thomas is the founder and artistic director of the charity Music and Theatre for All, former Guest Artistic Advisor to the York Early Music Festival, was Belknap Fellow at Princeton University, New Jersey in 2017, and is proud to sing and play with Bjarte Eike's Alehouse Boys.

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