Thursday 26 April 2012 7.30pm
Barbican Hall

Gerald Barry
The Importance of Being Earnest
Opera in three acts based on the text by Oscar Wilde
Barbican co-commission: European premiere

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
Thomas Adès conductor

Barbara Hannigan Cecily Cardew
Peter Tantsits John Worthing
Joshua Bloom Algernon Moncrieff
Katalin Károlyi Gwendolen Fairfax
Hilary Summers Miss Prism
Alan Ewing Lady Bracknell
Benjamin Bevan Lane/Merriman
Joshua Hart Dr Chasuble

There will be one interval of 20 minutes between Acts 2 and 3.
An unsettling diagonal
Gerald Barry and opera

What at first disturbs us as ‘unnatural’ sooner or later gets to seem normal. Perhaps Barry’s operas have not got there yet; they still appear edgy and strange, and perhaps they will for a while longer. But now that more than 20 years have passed since the first of them, *The Intelligence Park*, and now that there are four more, the Barryesque is beginning to feel like one of multifarious opera’s possible modes.

What distinguishes it? High definition, yes. Sound in a state of tension, sound stretched, yes. Insistent pulse, certainly. But opera is always chiefly about voices, and it is Barry’s vocal style that most surprises, even disconcerts. Generally in opera people mean what they sing. Our long-established operatic culture has all kinds of codes within which characters can proclaim their devotion, their grief, their desire for vengeance, or whatever. And those codes have proved surprisingly resilient, capable of surviving through four centuries of operatic development, from Monteverdi to much that is happening now. Barry, however, sets them aside. A high note from one of his characters may indeed convey a moment of intense feeling, but it may equally just be where the vocal line seems to want to go at that point. And he pays scant regard to the thickly encrusted conventions within which people in opera are wont to give voice to their feelings. If those conventions were to be applied, most of Barry’s people would have to appear insane because they voice themselves in lines that career across registers, that stop in the wrong places (that is, contradicting the phrasing of the words) and that very often repeat themselves, as if caught up in manic confusion. What is normally orderly in opera – or as orderly as it can be in this unlikely world where everything is sung – Barry flings wild. His characters do not behave appropriately and express what they feel; they go further, into bizarre exaggeration, or they do not venture so far, being held in stillness.

Time is crucial here, for these characters do not exist in the kind of progressive time that is usual in western music. Barry’s music – set to a steady pulse, often fast, with a good deal of rotation and repetition in the melodic material – gives us, rather, the impression of people caught on a merry-go-round, speedy and brilliantly painted, from which they
yell out as they pass. Producing melodies that whirl, stop or jump, these people are in a continuous present, a world adrift from memory and devoid of obligations, a world that in some senses offers us the acme of opera as essentially amoral, the playground of masquerade and desire.

To unmask masquerade and unclothe desire, however, is the act of a percipient and determined moralist – and Barry’s operas are moralities, too, in the way they enlarge the scope of what can seem natural and push further the barriers of prejudice. With the conventions of operatic vocalising all unwrapped, Barry’s characters stand before us in a condition of nakedness that evokes not only shock and bewilderment but also pity. They are no longer in control. The ground on which they might have stood has gone from beneath their feet: the ground of rhythm and phrasing and, most crucially, of harmony. They live in a musical world whose tonality is cracked, besmirched, degraded, ambiguous – a world that is open, therefore, to the expression of uncertainty and irresolution.

Barry’s alert zigzags, crazed colours and musical-dramatic underminings spring from various sources: opera seria (especially Handel’s), the mechanical Stravinsky of Les noces, the extreme intervals of Webern’s songs. And his operatic zest has taken him to diverse situations: the 18th century in his first two stage works, The Intelligence Park and The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit, then a play by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant) about a passionate woman in midlife and her failing, stunted or unpursued relationships with her younger lover, her daughter and her secretary, in a totally female cast to contrast with the largely male Intelligence Park, and from there on to a monodrama by Strindberg in which a woman confronts her husband’s mistress (La Plus Forte), followed now by classic comedy (The Importance of Being Earnest). Barry does all these differently, his settings as diverse as the original pieces. But we are everywhere in the same world, where emotion is all over the place and unplaceable, alien even to the characters who feel themselves to be feeling it.

Introduction © Paul Griffiths
‘The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility.’

It demands courage to set a much-admired play to music. Think of Verdi fending off Arrigo Boito and his publisher Giulio Ricordi before finally succumbing to their Otello project; or of Antonio Somma’s libretto for King Lear that the same composer was said to keep beside his bed but which never became an opera. Gerald Barry has previously tackled the iconic, turning Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s film The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant into music drama. But The Importance of Being Earnest would seem to be an altogether tougher proposition.

It began as a commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Not that Wilde’s ‘trivial comedy for serious people’ was Barry’s first suggestion when ‘Tom Adès and the LA Phil asked me to do something for the festival in April last year. I had already thought about the Wilde, but after some years had decided that it was impractical. What could one possibly bring to such a cut-glass text which is so perfect?’ But Adès and the Los Angeles orchestra were much taken with the idea of an operatic Earnest. ‘That was the one that they homed in on … so I was forced to confront it.’

‘Do you smoke?’ ‘Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.’ ‘I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is.’

Barry, like so many audiences before him, knew that Wilde’s last play – written in the summer of 1894 – is all but perfect in its final construction. It was the actor-manager George Alexander (who was the first Jack, as well as the producer of the play), who suggested that Wilde should cut his original four acts to three and so tighten the action, losing a character in the process.

The Importance of Being Earnest is also the apotheosis of the paradox in which utterly incompatible ideas are briefly united by Wilde’s dizzying use of language. ‘It’s almost an unreal text now – famous for being famous’, says Barry. ‘It’s like a sacred thing. So tackling it was a real mountain to climb … what I did was to cut two-thirds of the play, which was quite radical. But I feel that the structure of it, the bones of it, are so strong that if you had never read it you wouldn’t know from my version that so much was missing.’

So which parts of Earnest were removed and why? ‘There were certain things that I felt were too complicated for singing. They were funny as speech but … it would have been a disservice to Wilde if I’d left them in because the whole point was that they were an ecstatic nonsense that an audience at a play would get but which simply wouldn’t have come across in an opera.’

Then came a moment of real literary daring, as Barry polished his libretto. ‘I’ve left out famous lines, like Lady Bracknell’s “To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness”. But I did leave other things in, like “A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it”.’

The first audience were puzzled about where to look for the moral of Wilde’s tale. Now we can see the play as a sharp-eyed satire on Victorian double-standards, Jack in town and Ernest in the country, a wife tending the family estate and a
mistress for urban fun; and marriage as a social marketplace. But perhaps the play and Algernon’s imaginary friend Bunbury are about another double life, that of Oscar Wilde. A happily married man with two sons in Chelsea but with Lord Alfred Douglas in Brighton as he put the final shine on the play. Is ‘to Bunbury’ a polite way of feasting with panthers?

Gerald Barry is alert to the darker themes in this comedy of manners. ‘One of the decisions I made about Lane – Algernon’s London butler – and Merriman – the servant in the country – was to have them sung by the same singer. Then whenever they said “Yes, sir” or “No, sir” I removed all the “sirs” so the butlers only ever say “Yes” or “No”, which is unheard of in a master/servant relationship. And by removing all those politenesses the butler suddenly takes on a sinister quality. It’s somehow like a Pinter play because it’s clearly incredibly rude for a servant just to address his master in that way. Things like this changed the atmosphere of the text and you don’t quite know what the relationship between master and servant is. Could it be sexual? You feel there’s something strange going on. So that is perhaps a mirror of the double life that Wilde himself led.’

‘Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.’

Nothing is quite as important in The Importance of Being Earnest as food. Algernon and Jack live for teatime, the cucumber sandwiches for Aunt Augusta and the muffins that Algy decimates in the country. Barry leaves the complete Wildean menu in place. ‘I didn’t remove any of the references to food. And because I cut so much of the rest of the play these food references loom infinitely larger in my version than the original. Indeed, it seems that the men are as interested, if not more interested, in food as they are in the women.’

Perhaps interested in each other, too, rather than in Gwendolen and Cecily. Barry hints at this when he parallels a First-Act love duet for Jack and Gwendolen with another in the next act for Jack and Algernon when they are quarrelling about the muffins and the girls. Both duets play with the same tune, Auld Lang Syne. (Barry has always had a gift for borrowing other music and bending it to his own creative purpose.) The composer is wary about this interpretation, though concedes, ‘It’s possible that the fact that the same music is used for the love duet and for the two men having a row … says something about them, even if I didn’t think of it consciously.’

‘The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don’t like that. It makes men so very attractive.’

Here’s another Wildean paradox. Lord Bracknell, the man of the house, stays at home, while his wife – like a predatory male – roams the social landscape in pursuit of suitable husbands. Barry expresses this paradox in a simple but telling way. The role of Lady Bracknell is written for a bass. ‘I did put a note in the vocal score which said that while I wouldn’t forbid people doing whatever they wanted in a staged performance, I had never imagined Lady Bracknell being in drag: I always saw her in a man’s suit and I felt that in a case like this a feminisation of the part, approaching the character in a camp way by dressing her up in women’s
clothes, would actually detract from the effect. I felt that in a suit there was something unnameable about Lady Bracknell which I found strong.’

‘All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That’s his.’

‘I suppose that when I began setting the play I tried to find music that would live up to the text and work at its level.’ But as Gerald Barry admits, words and music didn’t quite meld at first. ‘I was trying too hard. And then I came up with this fake serial music, which is only used occasionally. But when I put it with the text it was perfect. It seemed to match the highly contrived world that Wilde had created.

‘The serial thing doesn’t appear until Lane announces the arrival of Jack. In fact the chord that I use for the moment when he says “Mr Ernest Worthing” is the famous one from Schoenberg’s *Five Orchestral Pieces*, the one from “Farben” (Colours). I thought that it would be very funny to use that chord for Lane’s announcement! Then when Jack and Algernon come in I use a serial style for their dialogue. “Earnest what brings you up to town?” “Pleasure! Eating, Algy?” It seemed as ridiculous as the text and it was just right. So it was a matter of actually having the courage to write fake music which was somehow truer to the Wilde than so-called original music.’

There are other musical borrowings in the score. *Auld Lang Syne* has already been mentioned, and in fact Barry’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* begins with Algy off-stage, battling his way through a fearsome piano piece that has its roots in this traditional Scottish melody. ‘This came about because of my interest in Beethoven. Beethoven made a setting of *Auld Lang Syne* when he composed settings of a number of Scottish folk songs for George Thomson, who also commissioned Haydn to do something similar. My great friend in LA, Betty Freeman, who died not long ago, commissioned a solo piano piece from me which was originally called *Le Vieux Sourd* – the old deaf one, which was Debussy’s nickname for Beethoven. This is the piano piece that opens the opera.

‘One takes these broader decisions which suddenly offer themselves to you and which are very useful pillars to structure a work around. *Auld Lang Syne* is such a beautiful song that I suddenly made a blanket decision to use the tune in a number of ways. For instance, when the butlers announce anyone they always use the opening notes of the tune.’ And, to notable dramatic effect, in the duets for Gwendolen and Jack and Jack and Algernon.

But how are we to explain Lady Bracknell, and later Miss Prism, bursting into distinctly contemporary arrangements of Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*? ‘It comes again from my love of Beethoven. I think of Lady Bracknell and her household, which of course once included Miss Prism, as being Germanophile. So it seemed natural to me that when Lady Bracknell got wound up emotionally she would suddenly break into German. And that’s also why she breaks into German in the Third Act and has this screaming address to the assembled company. I also decided to make her and Miss Prism composers, which is why in the opera, as a treat for them, I gave them a chance to sing their own settings of *Freude schöner Götterfunken!*’
'Few girls of the present day have any ... of the qualities that improve ... with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces.'

The musical ensemble for *The Importance of Earnest* is a modest 24 players, consisting of strings, woodwind and Barry’s beloved brass. But there’s something new here. ‘I used quite a lot of percussion, which is unusual for me. So that in the famous scene between Cecily and Gwendolen when they hurl insults at each other I asked myself what would be an expression of their anger with each other and I suddenly thought breaking things. So 40 dinner plates are broken during that scene and the breaking of these plates becomes a percussion machine.’

Cecily and Gwendolen are also required to shout at each other through megaphones or loud hailers. ‘Then, because of the Germanness that threads through the piece and because one equates viciousness with Fascism, I have the percussion play army hobnailed marching boots on a plank of wood. And then to top it off I have the girls shoot one other as a final straw but they simply go on to have afternoon tea because I think of the women as the “undead” in a way.’

As you might expect in Barry, the best of his music is often reserved for the brass, which can be both raucous and tuneful. Indeed this score moves happily between the lyric and the buzzingly angry. And it’s usually the trumpet and the horns leading the chase. ‘I love horns’, says Barry. ‘And I love horn players who have an outdoors hunting sound. The music of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert is so filled with horns. You can imagine the coaches arriving in Vienna and the sound of the horns and the trumpet. So it’s trumpets as well. Somehow that’s in my DNA. So it was inevitable that the weight of the score would lie with the brass. At the beginning of Act 2 when Cecily says “Jack is so serious. He cannot be quite well”, you hear the *Last Post* on the trumpet.’

‘I have always been of the opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing.’

The vocal parts in Barry’s version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, particularly for the younger women, are never less than challenging. Having become part of the undead after tea with Miss Fairfax, Cecily Cardew rejoins the human race – of singers that is – in Act 3 when Barry gives her a gravity-defying high note, sung tonight by his friend Barbara Hannigan. ‘There’s a high D at the end because she has very little to do in Act 3. I knew that these women could toss off these high things with no problems, like acrobats or trapeze artists.

‘There is a kind of hysteria in the play, a heightened quality, and the vocal line perhaps subconsciously mirrors that. It’s very hard to think of anything that’s like Wilde’s text for *The Importance of being Earnest*. I don’t know of any real precedent for it ... though I suppose *Alice in Wonderland* might be in the same family, with its ecstatic nonsense. Using the voices in this way would heighten that kind of quality of hysteria even further and bring it up a notch more.’

‘To be born, or at any rate bred, in a handbag ... seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution.’
Act 1

Algernon Moncrieff is playing his own arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* for solo piano off-stage while his manservant Lane lays out afternoon tea, including cucumber sandwiches and bread and butter, for his master’s expected guests: his Aunt Augusta, Lady Bracknell and his cousin Gwendolen.

Lane announces Algernon’s friend Ernest, who is also known as Jack Worthing – and who is utterly besotted with Gwendolen. Algernon has come across Ernest’s cigarette case inscribed with the message ‘From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack’. He declares that Ernest may not marry Gwendolen until he reveals the true identities of Jack and Cecily. Ernest explains that he is Ernest in town and Jack in the country and that Cecily is his ward. As far as Cecily is concerned, Ernest is his ne’er-do-well younger brother who is always in some kind of trouble, So Jack is a Bunburyist, says Algernon, who also leads a double life by pretending to have an imaginary invalid friend called Bunbury who often requires his presence in the country.

Lady Bracknell and her daughter Gwendolen are announced. Lady Bracknell asks for cucumber sandwiches and declares her hatred of French music before bursting into her own setting of *Freude schöner Götterfunken*.

With Lady Bracknell and Algernon safely out of the way, Jack proposes to Gwendolen and is accepted. How can she not love a man whose name is Ernest?

Having discovered her daughter has become engaged to Jack, Lady Bracknell quizzes her future son-in-law about his lineage. When she discovers that he knows nothing of his parents and that he was adopted, having been found in a handbag at Victoria Station, she refuses to countenance the match. Jack manages to give Gwendolen his address in the country, which is also noted by Algernon who scribbles it on his cuff. As his guests depart, he tells Lane to put out his country clothes as he will be visiting his friend Bunbury.

Act 2

In the country Cecily is studying German with her governess, Miss Prism. German grammar, she declares, makes her look plain. Miss Prism, a composer and an ardent Germanophile breaks into her own setting of *Freude schöner Götterfunken*.

Now Algernon, masquerading as her guardian’s brother Ernest, arrives and quickly charms her. It is Cecily’s dream to marry a man who is wicked and bad and called Ernest. Algernon quickly makes plans for Dr Chasuble, the rector, to rechristen him Ernest. Meanwhile, Jack arrives with the sad news that Ernest has passed away in Paris. But Ernest is here, says Cecily.

Never can the trains from London have been so busy. Hot on Algy’s heels, Gwendolen arrives. As Cecily is giving her tea the two young women discover that they are both engaged to ‘Ernest’ and there is a violent storm over the tea cups. When Jack and Algy return they are exposed and Cecily and Gwendolen, united as sisters now, leave their two suitors to quarrel over Bunburying and a plate of muffins.

Act 3

Cecily and Gwendolen tell Jack and Algy that their Christian names are an insuperable bar to marriage. The men are agreed: Dr Chasuble will have to rechristen them both.

Lady Bracknell has also taken the train from London and on arriving in the country is shocked to discover that her nephew
appears to have become engaged to Cecily without her permission. But when she discovers that this is a young woman in possession of a fortune her doubts are banished. However, Jack – in his capacity as Cecily’s guardian – refuses to give his consent to the marriage until Lady Bracknell permits him and Gwendolen to be united.

This social Gordian knot is unloosed when Miss Prism reappears. Twenty-eight years earlier, when working as a governess in the Bracknell household, she had inadvertently confused a three-volume novel that she had written with her young charge and left the boy in a bag at Victoria Station and put the novel in the perambulator she was wheeling. Discovering her error, she had fled.

Jack produces the handbag. He is Lady Bracknell’s long-lost nephew and therefore Algernon’s older brother. And his name? The same as that of his father General Moncrieff, says Lady Bracknell. A search of the army records solves the mystery. It is Ernest. Gwendolen is ecstatic. Now the two couples can be married and with them, Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble.

Programme note and Synopsis © Christopher Cook
About tonight’s performers

Thomas Adès conductor

Born in London in 1971, Thomas Adès studied piano and composition at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and read music at King’s College, Cambridge. Renowned as both a composer and a performer, he works regularly with the world’s leading opera companies and festivals.

Recent conducting engagements include concerts with the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome, his debut with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, a tour with the Britten Sinfonia, concerts with the BBC, City of Birmingham, Danish Radio, Finnish Radio, London and São Paulo State Symphony orchestras, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Gulbenkian Orchestra as part of a Gulbenkian Foundation Residency, the Los Angeles and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic orchestras, Philharmonia Orchestra, Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (whose Music Director he was between 1998 and 2000), London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern and the Athelas Ensemble.

In the opera house he has recently conducted The Rake’s Progress at Covent Garden and Zurich Opera. As a pianist he has given a recital at Carnegie Hall with Ian Bostridge and appeared with Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic. Last season he was Artist-in-Residence at the Melbourne Festival and plans include a piano recital at the Festival de Saint-Denis and The Tempest at the Metropolitan Opera and Opéra de Quebec.

Thomas Adès’s music has attracted numerous awards and prizes, including the prestigious Grawemeyer Award (in 2000, for Asyla), of which he is the youngest-ever recipient.

Barbara Hannigan soprano

Born and brought up in Canada, Barbara Hannigan studied at the University of Toronto and the Royal Conservatory of The Hague.

Much in demand in contemporary music – she has given over 75 world premieres – she also excels in Baroque and Classical repertoire. Equally at home in the concert hall and on the operatic stage, she has performed with many of the world’s leading conductors. She made her own conducting debut at Paris’s Théâtre du Châtelet, with Stravinsky’s Renard.

As a performer of Ligeti’s music she has received much acclaim. Mysteries
of the Macabre has become a signature work, which she has sung—and sometimes also conducted—at Lincoln Center, the Berlin Philharmonie, Théâtre du Châtelet, Salzburg Festival, Disney Hall in Los Angeles, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Vienna Konzerthaus and elsewhere.

Her operatic repertory ranges from Ligeti’s *Le grand macabre* to Handel’s *Rinaldo* and *Ariodante*. She has created roles in works including Pascal Dusapin’s *Passion* at Aix-en-Provence, Louis Andriessen’s *Writing to Vermeer* for the Netherlands Opera, Gerald Barry’s *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* for English National Opera and the title-role in Toshio Hosokawa’s *Matsukaze* for La Monnaie.

Upcoming engagements include performances at Aix of George Benjamin’s *Written on Skin*, debuts at the Royal Opera House and the Teatro Liceu in Barcelona, a European tour of Boulez’s *Pli selon pli* with the Ensemble Intercontemporain conducted by the composer, and the world premiere of Hans Abrahamsen’s *let me tell you* with the Berlin Philharmonic. This year she sings her first Lulu at La Monnaie.

**Peter Tantsits tenor**

American tenor Peter Tantsits began his training as a violinist, earning degrees from Yale University and the Oberlin Conservatory. Noted for performances of music by Berg, Janáček and Ligeti, he has also established a reputation as a leading interpreter of new works.

Recent performances include his debut at La Scala, Milan, as well as debuts with the China and Munich Philharmonic orchestras, American, London and National Symphony orchestras, Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. For his debut with the New York Philharmonic he sang in the acclaimed New York premiere of Ligeti’s *Le grand macabre*.

Festival appearances include the Aldeburgh Festival, BAM’s Next Wave Festival, the Beijing International Music Festival and Musikfest Bremen. He created the high tenor roles of Colin McPhee (Ziporyn’s *A House in Bali*) and Xu Xian (Zhou Long’s *Madame White Snake*), the latter winning a Pulitzer Prize last year.

Forthcoming engagements include concert performances at the Cork Opera House, the Holland Festival, Baryshnikov Arts Center and ACHT BRÜCKEN: Musik für Köln, a return to the Vienna Konzerthaus for Royston Maldoom’s staging of *Carmina burana* and, for the Bern State Theatre, new productions of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *La Cenerentola*. 
Joshua Bloom bass

Joshua Bloom was born in Melbourne and completed his BA in History at the University of Melbourne.

In 1998 he made his Opera Australia debut in The Barber of Seville with OzOpera, the touring arm of the company. He became a young artist, and later a principal guest artist, for the company and received Green Room awards for the roles of Dandini and Nick Shadow. Other roles for Opera Australia have included Schaunard (La bohème), Guglielmo (Cosi fan tutte), the title-role in The Marriage of Figaro, Escamillo (Carmen), Leporello (Don Giovanni) and Rodolfo (La sonnambula). In 2002 he was awarded Opera Foundation Australia’s scholarship to study at the Vienna State Opera, performing Fiorello (The Barber of Seville) and the Imperial Commissioner (Madama Butterfly).

He joined San Francisco Opera’s Merola Programme, performing Gianni Schicchi and Doctor Bartolo (The Barber of Seville). Other roles in San Francisco included Angelotti (Tosca), Garibaldo (Rodelinda), Ribbing (Un ballo in maschera) and the Black Politician in the American premiere of Ligeti’s Le grand macabre. He made his Chicago Opera debut in Béatrice et Bénédict, appeared in The Magic Flute and Salome for Santa Fe Opera and sang Don Alfonso (Cosi fan tutte) for San Francisco Opera’s Western Opera Theater, Alidoro (La Cenerentola) for Garsington Opera Festival and A Midsummer Night’s Dream for the Teatro Petruzelli, Bari. He has sung Masetto and Truffaldino for the Metropolitan Opera, New York.

In concert he has appeared with the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonic orchestras.

This season he reprises Masetto at the Metropolitan Opera, returns to Opera Australia as Figaro and to Garsington Opera as Leporello.

Katalin Károlyi mezzo-soprano

Born in Hungary, Katalin Károlyi studied singing with Noëlle Barker and Julia Hamari. She went on to set up Studio Versailles Opéra with Rachel Yakar and René Jacobs. Other conductors with whom she has worked include Yehudi Menuhin, William Christie, Philippe Herreweghe and David Robertson.

Opera productions include performances at the Opéra National de Paris, Teatro alla Scala, Wiener Festwochen, Almeida Opera and the Aix-en-Provence Festival. She has also appeared at Chicago’s Ravinia Festival, the Salzburg Festival, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Barbican Centre, Queen Elizabeth Hall, BBC Proms and Cité de la Musique.
She frequently appears with ensembles such as Ictus, London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Amadinda, Asko | Schoenberg and Musikfabrik and has recently appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group and the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra.

She has had numerous works composed for her including Ligeti’s Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedüvel, which she has performed frequently and recorded for Teldec Classics.

Other notable engagements have included Ligeti’s Aventures, nouvelles aventures in New York and Paris, Berio’s Folksongs with Psappha, Steve Reich’s Tehillim with the RIAS Kammerchor, Les noces at the Ruhr Festival, Sciarrino’s Infinito nero and the world premiere of John Woolrich’s The Sea and Its Shore for Almeida Opera.

Katalin Károlyi has many broadcasts and recordings to her credit, including with Les Arts Florissants, Groupe Vocal de France, Le Parlement de Musique and La Chapelle Royale.

In Britain she has forged a special relationship with Michael Nyman, recording soundtracks to many of his film scores. She has also worked frequently with Joby Talbot.

Hilary Summers has worked with many leading exponents of Baroque music, such as Christopher Hogwood, Paul McCrerrush, Robert King, Christophe Rousset, Andrew Manze, Christian Curnyn, Thomas Hengelbrock, Sir John Eliot Gardiner and William Christie.

In recent years her operatic roles have ranged from Handel to Mescalina in Ligeti’s Le grand macabre, as well as Mrs Sedley (Peter Grimes) for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Washerwoman (Rob Zuidam’s Rages d’amour) at the Netherlands Opera and Hippolyta (A Midsummer Night’s Dream) for the Teatro Real, Madrid.

This season she sings Geneviève (Pelléas et Mélisande) in Madrid and Barcelona, Juno (Semele) in Paris and the Sorceress (Dido and Aeneas) with the Early Opera Company.

In the concert hall she has sung The Dream of Gerontius and Sea Pictures under the late Vernon Handley.

Her many recordings range from Handel via Rossini to Nyman.

**Hilary Summers contralto**

Hilary Summers enjoys a varied career encompassing repertoire from the 12th to the 21st centuries. A true contralto with a wide vocal range, she has excited the attention of many contemporary composers, creating the roles of Stella in Elliott Carter’s opera What Next?, Irma in Peter Eötvös’s opera Le balcon and the lead role in Michael Nyman’s Facing Goya.

She has also performed Boulez’s Le marteau sans maître throughout Europe under the composer and others, her recording of which won a Grammy Award. As part of the celebrations for Boulez’s 80th birthday, she sang Le visage nuptial under his direction.
Alan Ewing bass

British bass Alan Ewing began his working life in the world of Renaissance and Baroque music, under such directors as Sir Roger Norrington, Philip Pickett, Andrew Parrott and Paul McCreesh, as well as making over 40 recordings with The Consort of Musicke and singing all the Monteverdi bass roles in productions at the Maggio Musicale Florence and in Pierre Audi’s cycle for the Netherlands Opera.

He then began a long association with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, most frequently as Polyphemus (Acis and Galatea), a signature role that he has also sung under Marc Minkowski and McCreesh.

Handel has, for many years, been a particular focus, including Hercules, Jephtha, La Resurrezione, Semele, Lotario, Giulio Cesare and Susanna.

His work now extends into mainstream bass repertory, including roles such as Osmin (Die Entführung aus dem Serail), Sarastro (The Magic Flute), Seneca (L’incoronazione di Poppea), Baron Ochs (Der Rosenkavalier), the title-roles in Bluebeard’s Castle and Sweeney Todd, Rocco (Fidelio), Heinrich der Vogler (Lohengrin), Leporello (Don Giovanni), Sparafucile (Rigoletto), Ferrando (Così fan tutte), Kutuzov (War and Peace), as well as roles in Les Troyens, Peter Grimes, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Billy Budd and performances of Verdi’s Requiem.

At the Royal Opera House he has recently sung in Salome under Philippe Jordan, Carmen under Daniel Oren and in Thomas Adès’s Powder Her Face.

Engagements this year include the Judith Weir’s Miss Fortune at the Royal Opera House and Zebul in Welsh National Opera’s revival of Jephtha.

Benjamin Bevan baritone

Benjamin Bevan won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and made his international debut at Lausanne Opera in La Cenerentola.

He made his UK debut with Scottish Opera as Marcello (La bohème) followed by return invitations to sing Fléville and Fouquier-Tinville in Andrea Chénier under Sir Richard Armstrong, as well as Riccardo (I puritani) and Lescaut (Manon) under Francesco Corti. He will return to Scottish Opera this autumn to sing Baron Duphol (La traviata). Next year he makes his debut at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, singing Henry Cuffe (Britten’s Gloriana).
In the concert hall he has just completed a tour of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* with the Bach Choir of the Netherlands and a semi-staging of Purcell’s *King Arthur* in Manchester and Paris which comes to the Barbican and Birmingham Symphony Hall in 2013. Previously, he has sung Vaughan Williams in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Christmas Day Concert, *The Dream of Gerontius* at Snape Maltings, Monteverdi’s *Vespers* with the New London Consort under Philip Pickett at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Bach’s *St John Passion* with the Irish Chamber Orchestra under Stephen Layton, *Messiah* with the Irish Baroque Orchestra, Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* in Monaco and Nice and *Carmina burana* with the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Recently, Benjamin Bevan sang the role of Pontius Pilate in a new staging of the *St John Passion* for the Netherlands’ Nationale Reisopera and the Speaker in *The Magic Flute* for the opening production at the new Garsington venue, Wormsley.

**Joshua Hart** *actor*

Joshua Hart’s most recent theatre production was *The Woman who Walked into Doors* at the Silk Street Theatre. Prior to that he went straight from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama into *Othello* at Sheffield’s Crucible. His debut film was *City Slacker*.

While at the Guildhall his parts included Christian (*Festen*), Buckingham (*Richard III*) and Will Dearth (*Dear Brutus*). He also represented the Guildhall at the Sam Wanamaker Festival at the Globe. Before attending drama school he graduated from Manchester University and was a member of the National Youth Theatre. Performances with the NYT include *The Merchant of Venice, 20 Cigarettes, Much Ado About Nothing*, and as a representative of Great Britain at the handover ceremony at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

**Birmingham Contemporary Music Group**

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group was formed by players from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 1987 and celebrates its 25th anniversary season in 2012/13. It quickly established a reputation for exciting performances, innovative audience-building and learning initiatives, and a central commitment to composers and the presentation of new work. It has premiered over 150 works, most commissioned through its pioneering Sound Investment scheme, with a family of investors supporting each new piece.

As well as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, BCMG projects in 2012 include a 60th-birthday concert for Oliver Knussen, featuring the world premiere of Tansy Davies’s Piano Concerto and the UK premiere of Magnus Lindberg’s *Souvenir*, and two performances of Heiner Goebbels’ *Walden* in collaboration with Ensemble Klang as
part of the London 2012 Festival. Next year’s projects include premieres of new works by Alexander Goehr in his 80th year and BCMG/SAM’s Apprentice Composer-in-Residence Joanna Lee, both conducted by Oliver Knussen; David Sawer’s new Rumpelstiltskin Suite at Wigmore Hall conducted by George Benjamin, alongside Benjamin’s Into the Little Hill; and the premiere of David Sawer’s The Lighthouse Keepers at Cheltenham Music Festival.

BCMG runs an extensive learning and participation programme, including projects with young people in and out of school and with adults in a range of community settings, as well as the group’s ground-breaking Family and Schools’ Concerts. The group has toured widely; recent highlights include concerts with Oliver Knussen in Barcelona and Madrid; with Thomas Adès at Carnegie Hall; and at the Aldeburgh Festival, including premieres of works by Elliott Carter in 2009 and 2011.

BCMG has two Artists-in-Association, Oliver Knussen and John Woolrich, and Sir Simon Rattle is the Group’s Founding Patron. The group has received several major awards, including a MIDEM award, two RPS Awards and Prudential, Gramophone and PRS Millennial awards.

### Violin
- Alexandra Wood
- Peter Campbell-Kelly

### Viola
- Christopher Yates

### Cello
- Ulrich Heinen

### Double Bass
- John Tattersdill

### Flute/Piccolo
- Marie-Christine Zupancic

### Oboe/Cor anglais
- Melinda Maxwell

### Clarinet
- Joanna Patton

### Bass Clarinet
- Mark O’Brien

### Bassoon
- Gretha Tuls

### Bassoon/Contrabassoon
- Margaret Cookhorn

### Horn
- Nicholas Korth
- Beth Randell

### Trumpet
- Jonathan Holland
- Alan Thomas

### Trombone
- Edward Jones

### Tuba
- Graham Sibley

### Percussion
- Julian Warburton
- Simon Limbrick
- Adam Morris

### Piano/Celesta
- Malcolm Wilson

### Repetiteur
- John Paul Gandy

The opening off-stage performance of *Auld Lang Syne* is played by Gerald Barry.

Crockery provided by
Red Rob Catering Supplies, Birmingham