



1960

BELFAST
OPERATIC
COMPANY

PRESENTS



THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

© Disney

A NEW MUSICAL
BASED ON THE VICTOR HUGO NOVEL
AND SONGS FROM THE DISNEY FILM

GRAND
OPERA
HOUSE

7TH - 11TH MARCH 2023
PROGRAMME

Belfast Operatic Company present
An amateur production by arrangement
with The Really Useful Group Ltd.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

MUSIC BY Andrew Lloyd Webber LYRICS BY Charles Hart

ADDITIONAL LYRICS BY Richard Stilgoe

BOOK BY Richard Stilgoe & Andrew Lloyd Webber

BASED ON THE NOVEL
"Le Fantome de l'Opéra" by Gaston Leroux

30 APR - 4 MAY 2024

Visit belfastoperatic.co.uk for more info

Give in to the power of
the music of the night!

Originally directed by Harold Prince, Orchestrations by David Cullen & Andrew Lloyd Webber
Original production by Cameron Mackintosh Ltd. and The Really Useful Group Ltd.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT MUSICAL?

So, just what makes a great musical? Is it the tunes? Is it the story? Is it the structure or a combination of all three?

It might be foolish however, to disagree with the late Stephen Sondheim, the man considered by many to have been one of the greatest musical theatre composers. The man behind shows such as *Company*, *Follies*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods* was in no doubt about the key to success in the genre.

According to him the most important element in any show is the book, that is to say the plot on which the whole structure is based. In other words, a coherent storyline is the cornerstone upon which every musical must rest.

It is no surprise therefore that many of the genre's biggest hits, particularly in the last 30 years, have been heavily based on established works of fiction and here Belfast Operatic has increasingly performed shows based on famous books.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame is the latest show based on a classic novel performed by the Company.

In November, 2021, the group sprung back into life following the Covid-19 pandemic with a production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Grand Opera House. While the music may have been by the Hunchback's composer, Alan Menken, the story, of course, was by Charles Dickens.

It was also the second time the Company had performed the musical here following a run at the Grand Opera House in 2013.

Jekyll and Hyde, staged by the Company at the Opera House in 2017, is Frank Wildhorn's musical based on Robert Louis Stevenson's story.

The Disney version of *Beauty and the Beast* staged by Belfast Operatic at the theatre in 2010 is based on a centuries old tale by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve.

Fiddler on the Roof, which the Company has staged here twice, is culled from the tales of Sholem Aleichem, an author who hailed from modern day Ukraine.

Kiss Me Kate, staged here in 2003, is of course, based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* while Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, which the Company staged at the Opera House in 1994, is based on Lynn Riggs 1930 play, *Green Grow The Lilacs*.

And next year Belfast Operatic will stage a modern day musical phenomenon, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*, at Newtownabbey's Theatre on the Mill. The show, of course, is based on Gaston Leroux's novel.



Musical Theatre At Its Best

Delivering the moments that matter to our members and our audience since 1960

If you want to find out more about BOC, or any of our upcoming productions advertised throughout this programme, please visit our new website at www.belfastoperatic.org



CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

It is with much pleasure that I welcome you to the Grand Opera House for BOC's latest musical spectacular, Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The story of Quasimodo, based on a novel by Victor Hugo, first hit screens in 1996 as a Disney animated movie, featuring a sumptuous musical score by Alan Menken. Some years later lyricist Stephen Schwartz and Alan Menken collaborated to produce a theatrical version which we are proud to stage tonight. The cast are all members of BOC and once you have experienced tonight's production, I'm sure you will agree we are indeed fortunate to have such a talented membership.

The rehearsal schedule has been intense, and I'm grateful to the entire cast for their commitment during the process. It's worth remembering that everyone you see on stage has a full-time job and so their commitment and dedication to this production, and indeed all our productions, stems from the enjoyment of being with friends and the love of live theatre.

We are fortunate to have Kerry Rodgers as our Director for this show. Kerry is fast becoming one of Northern Ireland's finest young directors. Kerry's creative vision for this show has really opened our eyes as to what is possible to portray on stage, and as well as this production being immensely entertaining, Kerry's determination and ability to address sensitive themes such as disability and cultural prejudice within the production adds much more significance to the finished article. We hope you will agree.

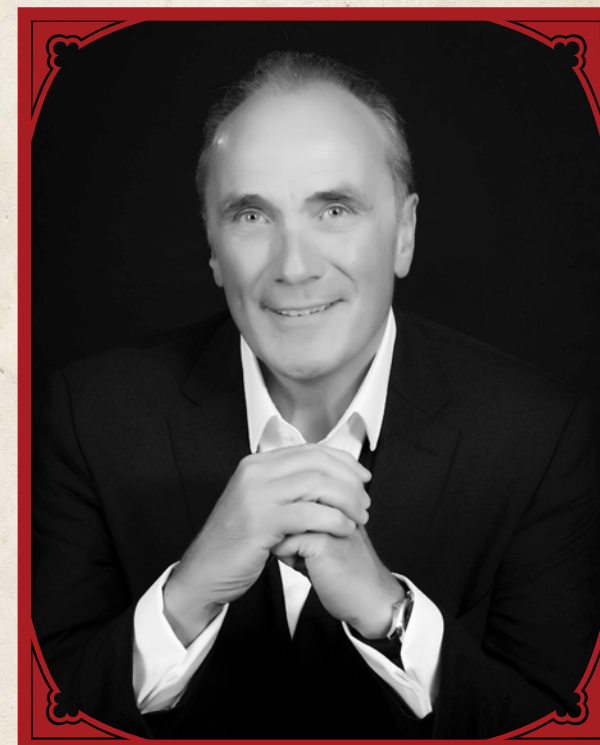
BOC continue to entertain audiences in Belfast and beyond with stage productions and concert performances regularly throughout the year.

You can keep up to date with all our activities online by visiting our website; www.belfastoperatic.org

Or follow us on socials @belfastoperatic
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[Twitter.com/belfastoperatic](https://www.twitter.com/belfastoperatic)

In the meantime, thank you for supporting BOC by being here tonight. Now, sit back and enjoy Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Colin Boyd



HUGO'S GOTHIC PLEA

The origin of one of the acclaimed masterpieces of French literature lies not so much in Victor Hugo's imagination but rather by his obsessive concern over the destruction of Paris' Gothic architecture.

Hugo was in his late 20s and a man with a cause. He was in thrall to Gothic architecture in the way 21st Century geeks are to computerised technology.

He had already published a paper entitled War to the Demolishers in which he openly spoke about the importance of the architecture as an art form.

However, it did not have the same effect as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Hugo's later

work became extremely popular and instigated a movement which fought for the preservation of Gothic architecture in Paris.

At the dawn of the 19th Century many gothic buildings were demolished with new structures taking their place.

Notre Dame at that time was in disrepair and deeply unpopular with Parisians. One example of the partial destruction of the building was the replacement of the original stained glass windows with plain white glass in order to allow more light into the church.

Cathedral authorities today admit that at the time Hugo lifted his pen in defence of

the building, the church was a wreck from years of being ignored and even vandalised.

In the book he ends the preface by predicting that "the church will, perhaps soon disappear from the face of the Earth." Instead, he managed to save it.

When *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* came out in 1831 it was such a literary success it brought to public attention the state of the Cathedral. As a result of Hugo's book and effort, King Louis Philippe ordered a restoration in 1844. Written with the hopes of saving an irreplaceable historic landmark of Paris that was on death's doorstep, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was able to bring it new life.



Architecture plays a role in the book as Hugo feared the practice was going to disappear because of the development of the printing press. He believed that individual's ideas would be more developed on paper and they would gradually lose interest in architecture. He thought his era would be the last where architecture would have a great artistic form.

In 1829 Hugo began his masterpiece and experts agree the book often focuses more on the style and the details of the building than on the story itself.

Hugo's book was originally entitled *Notre-Dame de Paris* 1482, leaving no doubt about the true subject of the story. Its translation is usually taken

to be "Our Lady of Paris". Historian Richard Buday said: "The Hunchback is a Gothic novel about a Gothic building. The story's moral focus is Notre-Dame cathedral. Architecture sets the stage, backdrops the major characters and forever binds their fates. The story's central character isn't a person it's a building which Hugo considered sentient." Hugo felt that Gothic architecture was an essential part of French culture and was endangered by the fashion for Baroque buildings.

The metaphor was not lost on its early readers who not only mourned for Quasimodo but rallied to raise money for the restoration of the cathedral.

Quasimodo is, in fact, a symbol of forgotten Gothic architecture of Paris and is Hugo's way of alerting the citizens of the City of Light to preserve its beautiful buildings.

Cathedral authorities say that today the book is more relevant than ever following the disastrous fire at the building in spring 2019. They say it reminded them almost two centuries later that Notre Dame de Paris has already been saved and re-built in the past.

Victor Hugo, author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, is known primarily as a writer. While it's true that he was a novelist, poet, essayist and dramatist, he was much more than a literary figure.

The man who is renowned in France for his poetry and lauded as being in the forefront of the Romantic literary movement in the country, was also an accomplished artist, a campaigner on huge social issues and, briefly, a politician.

And he also had an affinity for the Channel Islands, living firstly in Jersey and then Guernsey for almost 20 years after going into exile after Napoleon the Third seized power in a coup in 1851.

To theatre fans he is known, of course, as the source for not only Hunchback but for arguably the greatest of modern musicals, *Les Misérables*, a story of good, evil and injustice

with an ex-convict and the June Rebellion in Paris in 1832 at its heart.

In a different sphere of the arts his works have inspired operas including Donizetti's *Lucretia Borgia*, Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *Erenani* as well as Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*.

Hugo was born in Besancon in eastern France in February 1802, the son of Sophie Trebuchet and the Napoleonic General, Joseph-Leopold Hugo.

He married Adele Foucher in October, 1822. Both had lengthy affairs with others but remained together until her death almost 46 years later.

Around the same time as his marriage, his first collection of poetry earned him a royal pension from Louis XVIII. It was the start of a writing career that endured until 1883, two years before his death at the age of 83.

His most notable works are *Ruy Blas*, a tragedy considered to be his best drama, written in 1838, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, written seven years earlier and *Les Misérables*, finished in 1862.

Hugo was also a talented artist and it's reckoned he created around 4,000 drawings in his time.

However, away from the dramatic and literary arts Hugo earned himself a reputation as a campaigner on social issues, some of which still divide people today.

In his lifetime he was an advocate for the abolition of slavery, a campaigner for the abolition of capital punishment and a promoter of social justice and the freedom of the Press. Hugo is also considered by historians to be one of the first to be in favour of a United States of Europe.

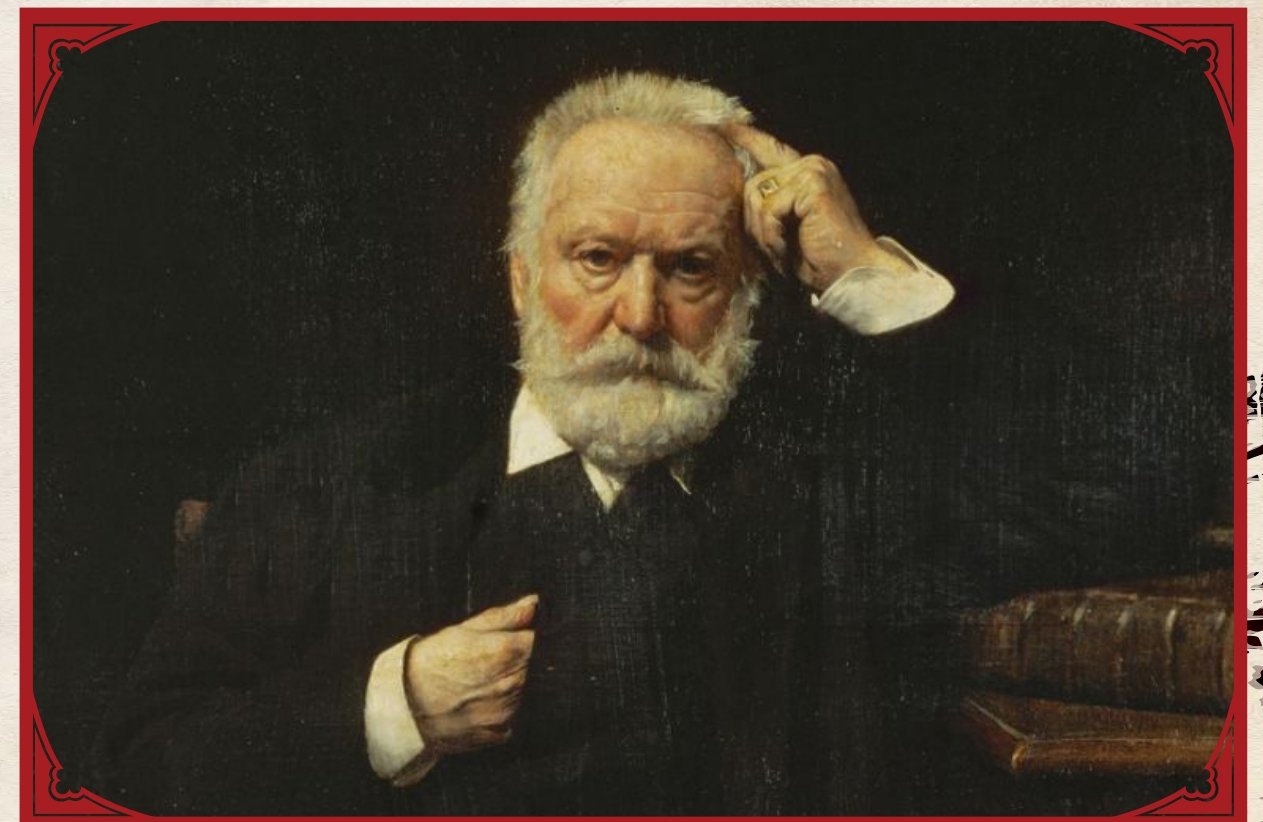
His political career took off in 1845 when he was nominated by King Louis Philippe to enter the upper chamber of Parliament.

Three years later Hugo was elected to the National Assembly of the Second Republic as a conservative. However, he broke with the grouping the following year when, returning to his lifelong ideals, he called for the end of misery and poverty, universal suffrage and free education for all children.

He went into exile in 1851 when Napoleon III seized power establishing an anti-Parliamentary constitution. Hugo's first move was to Brussels but he only stayed there a matter of months before upping sticks and heading to the Channel Islands. In 1852 he settled in Jersey but three years later he moved to Guernsey and stayed there until Napoleon's fall from power in 1870. He again lived in Guernsey from 1872-3.

VICTOR HUGO

THE POET,
THE ARTIST,
& THE ACTIVIST



ADAPTING THE STORY

Inevitably, it has been hard for film and television producers to keep their hands off such a famous story as Hugo's *Hunchback* with the majority of them straying from the much darker text of the book.

Cinematic versions date back to the early days of the 20th Century with "*Esmerelda*", a French (very) short film, the oldest film adaptation of the novel. The movie, with Denise Becker in the title role and Henry Vorins as Quasimodo, only ran for ten minutes. A longer 1911 silent French version, this time entitled "*Notre-Dame de Paris*", starred Henry Krauss and Stacia Napierkowska and ran for 26 minutes. It is considered to be faithful to Hugo's book.

Hollywood first took up the challenge in 1917 with "*The Darling of Paris*", a silent romantic drama starring

Theda Bara and Glen White. It's regarded as a very loose adaptation of the story. British cinema got in on the action in 1922 with yet another film entitled "*Esmerelda*", a silent movie directed by Edwin J Collins and starring a scarcely credible 40-year-old Sybil Thorndike in the title role with Booth Conway as Quasimodo.

"*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*", made in 1923 by American corporation, Universal Pictures and with Lon Chaney as the Hunchback and Patsy Ruth Miller as Esmerelda, was the company's biggest release that year and its most successful silent film.

Hollywood returned to the subject in 1939 when RKO Radio Pictures teamed British actor Charles Laughton with 18-year-old Dubliner Maureen O'Hara

in the leading roles in "*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*". It was O'Hara's American screen debut. The company splashed out on an expensive and extensive set, reckoned to cost more than \$5 million in today's terms, and roughly one-eighth of a budget which ran to \$1.8m.

The first version of the story to be filmed in colour came in 1956 when a French/Italian production cast Anthony Quinn and Gina Lollobrigida, who died in January aged 95, as the leads. The film was known alternatively as "*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*" and "*Notre-Dame de Paris*" depending on the territory it was shown in. In the version released in France everyone spoke in French while in the more widely-released piece, Quinn and Lollobrigida spoke in English with the French actors having their voices dubbed into the language. Television companies on

both sides of the Atlantic have also made films of the story for their respective audiences. The BBC was first in on the act in 1977 with the late Warren Clarke cast as Quasimodo opposite Michelle Newell.

In 1982 the story was filmed by American firm Hallmark and televised by CBS. It starred Anthony Hopkins as Quasimodo and Lesley Anne Down as Esmerelda. British actor Derek Jacobi was cast as Frollo with David Suchet, best known in the UK for his performances as Poirot, as Clopin. The cast also included Robert Powell, Tim Piggott-Smith and John Gielgud. A joint Australian/American fantasy animated film was made in 1986 while the Disney Corporation brought out its first animated musical film of the subject and the

version which spawned the stage musical in 1996. The music, of course, was supplied by Alan Menken with lyrics by Stephen Schwartz while the leads were voiced by Tom Hulce and Demi Moore.

Six years later, various wings of the Disney group came together to produce "*The Hunchback of Notre Dame II*". Hulce and Moore reprised their studio roles while Kevin Kline voiced Pheobus. Another made for TV movie, this time starring Mandy Patinkin as Quasimodo, Salma Hayek as Esmerelda, Richard Harris as Frollo and Jim Dale as Clopin, was made for the Turner Network in 1997.

A French comedic adaptation of the novel moves the action to the Caribbean. "*Quasimodo d'El Paris*"

was released in 1999. Its supposition is that when a ten-year-old Quasimodo shows signs of deformity his well-to-do parents place him in the charge of the town's mysterious evangelist, Frollo. In exchange they adopt Esmerelda, a Cuban girl from a lower social class. Ten years later a serial killer is on the loose in El Paris and Quasimodo is the main suspect. Apart from the made for television films, the medium has also produced other versions of the Hugo novel. A 1966 BBC miniseries consisting of seven episodes was broadcast in the spring of that year.

More than 20 major theatre productions have been staged down the years as well as five ballets based on the storyline.



FROM PARIS TO BERLIN

The stage version of the Disney adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was the Coporation's first musical to premiere outside the United States. For some time the Berlin theatre, now known as the Theatre am Potsdamer Platz, was in talks with the giant American company to stage *The Lion King*. However, after those negotiations ultimately failed, Disney offered *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* instead.

The project saw the theatre, often considered Germany's market leader in the production of stage musicals, abandon its policy of only importing shows which had been a success on Broadway.

At a cost of 45 million German Marks, *Der Glockner von Notre Dame* – literally The Bellringer of Notre Dame – opened in June, 1999. Three years and 1,204 performances later the curtain came down on the production in June, 2002. It's reckoned that 1.4 million people saw the show during the run.

With American director, playwright, librettist and screenwriter, James Lapine, best known for his Broadway collaborations with composers Stephen Sondheim and William Finn, at the helm as both director and librettist, the show was originally rehearsed in English, then in

German. The German translation by Michael Kunze was then performed by 42 actors from six different countries over the three years of its run.

Der Glockner was an isolated show, only playing in German theatres and not licenced to other companies. The musical was not staged again in this format for several years although adaptations of the 1996 film could be seen in various productions in Disney theme parks and on the company's cruise liners.

In 2008, Stephen Schwartz, one of the major figures behind the Disney film adaptation of the story, said he was hoping to work on the project again soon. In November, 2010, Alan Menken, another of the original Disney team, confirmed he was working on an American production which would use Lapine's libretto.

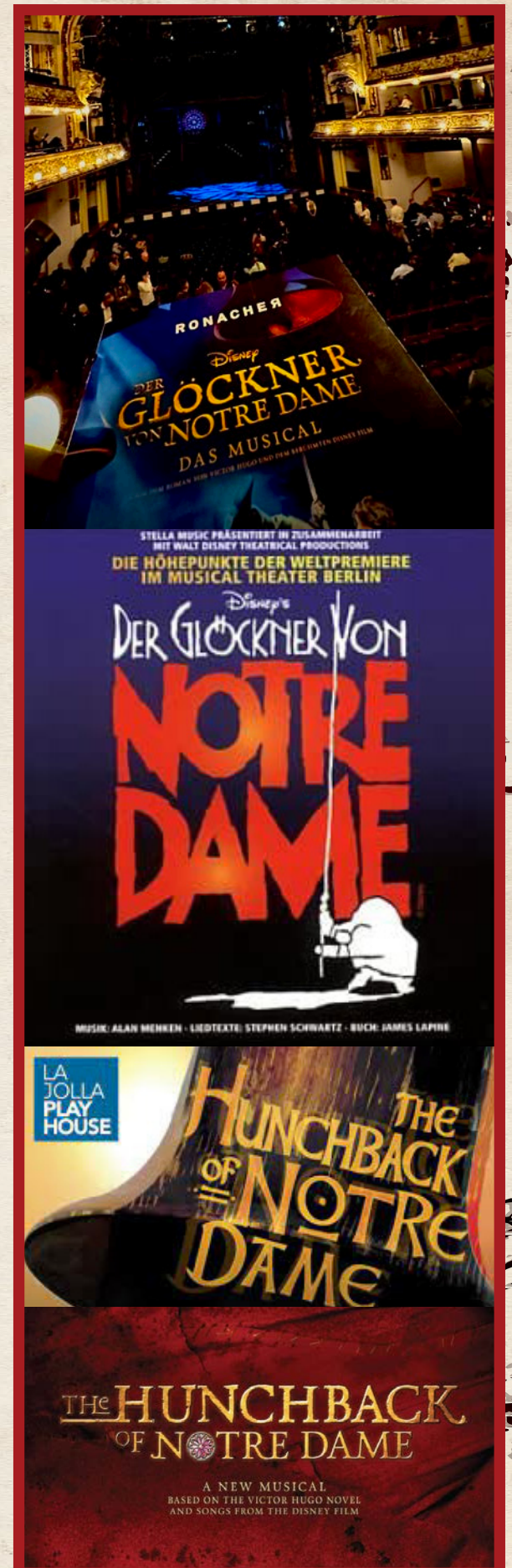
On January 9, 2013, it was announced the musical would finally be produced for a Broadway performance with a new book by Peter Parnell and music by Menken and Schwartz.

In April, 2013, the first English adaptation of *Der Glockner von Notre Dame* was staged

by the fine Arts Center in Palm Beach, Florida. It did not include all the songs from *Der Glockner* and excluded the deaths of Esmerelda and Frollo. It was an amateur production but notable for being the first English staging of the musical rather than a translation of the film.

At the D23 expo in August, 2013, the first official English version of a new song written for the stage musical, "Made of Stone", was performed. The new version of the *Hunchback* had a workshop in February, 2014, and its North American premiere at San Diego's La Jolla Playhouse from October to December 2014. The production then transferred to the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey, running from March 4 – April 5, 2015. It was announced it wasn't going to transfer to Broadway but the structure of the show was finalised with one song, "Agnes Dei", cut from the production and then turned into a work that would be licenced for performing. A wave of American regional theatres staged the work from 2016 before it finally made its New York regional bow at the White Plains Performing Arts Centre in December, 2017.

An adaptation of the show debuted at Sacramento in 2016 embracing the novel's assertion that Quasimodo had become deaf after ringing bells all his life by incorporating sign language into the show. Deaf actor John McGinty was cast in the lead role with one of the Notre Dame saints singing Quasimodo's songs while McGinty signed. A Japanese cast opened in 2016 at the Shiki Theatre Company, one of the country's largest. It is a direct translation of the current revision of the Disney version. No songs or scenes have been changed outside of translation. It premiered in Wales in 2019 at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.



WHAT MAKES A MYTH?

Was there really a character named Quasimodo or did Victor Hugo invent him for the purposes of his novel?

British sculptor Henry Sibson, who worked on the renovation of the Cathedral in the early 19th Century and who later wrote an autobiography which included details of his time in Paris, holds the key to the mystery.

With the building in disrepair after the French Revolution the Cathedral with many statues and gargoyles that adorned the exterior destroyed or stolen there are numerous historical references to stone carvers coming to renovate the Notre Dame, among them Sibson.

He references an issue with the contractor that hired him. In his words they had a falling out and forced him to find another job at the Government studios. There he met another carver named Monsieur Trajan, who he remarked as a “worthy and amiable man that has ever existed”.

Sibson continued that Trajan worked under a Government sculptor who they rarely saw because he didn't like to mix with the carvers. He didn't name him but said that he was humpbacked and was known by the nickname, “Le bossu”, which is French for “the hunchback”.

Furthermore he writes that “Le bossu” was more than happy to tell Mons. Trajan “to take the little Englishman to Dreux” outside Paris where the craftsmen worked on their projects. By itself Sibson's memoir can be viewed as not that reliable but when compared to other reports from the time a pattern emerges. Archivists have studied the recovered historical documents detailing Sibson's time in Paris and the restoration of the cathedral.

Based on their findings they conclude Sibson referred to the same individual Hugo references in his stories. In addition, it's noted that Sibson described known artisans active in the same part of Paris where Hugo and Sibson lived in the 1820s.



More documents support this theory as “Le bossu” refers to bringing the Englishman along with them. The “Almanach of Paris 1833” lists all the area's professional inhabitants including the carver Mons. Trajan.

It's also likely that Trajan continued to work there. The carvers that would have worked on Notre Dame lived in the 6th Arrondissement of Paris and worked out of the atelier of L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Hugo also lived in this area and proposed to his wife in Dreux where Sibson and his team worked. So it's highly likely that Hugo would have seen Trajan, Sibson and “Le Bossu” during his time there.

In Hugo's early versions of Les Miserables he even mentions the main character's name is Jean Trajean before altering it to Jean Valjean.

This is where the story of the actual hunchback of Notre Dame begins to come together. Hugo was inspired by real life events and the people around him.

To this day archivists don't know the real name of “Le Bossu” although inevitably he was a real person who lived in Paris during the early 19th Century.

Essentially Quasimodo is a metaphor for the cathedral. He's malformed and misunderstood but ultimately good hearted.

This interpretation makes a lot of sense when comparing it to how Hugo described the novel in a letter to his publisher.

He wrote:” The principal character is neither Quasimodo nor Claude Frollo but Notre-Dame de Paris. Everything there is grand, uncommon, extraordinary.”

THE WRITERS



PETER
PARNELL

Book

Peter Parnell most recently wrote the new book for the Broadway revival of Lerner and Lane's *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever*, starring Harry Connick Jr. and Jessie Mueller.

His plays include *Trumpet* (Atlantic Theatre Company), *QED* starring Alan Alda (Mark Taper Forum, Vivian Beaumont, LCT), a two-part stage adaptation of John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (Seattle Rep, Taper, Atlantic, American Theatre Critics Association Award).

His other plays, *Sorrows of Stephen*, *The Rise and Rise of Daniel Rocket*, *Romance Language*, *Hyde in Hollywood*, *Flaubert's Latest*, and *An Imaginary Life*, were first produced by the Public Theater and at Playwrights Horizons.

For television, Parnell was a co-producer for "The West Wing" (two EMMY Award citations), and a producer for "The Guardian," "Inconceivable," and "Six Degrees."

His children's book *And Tango Makes Three*, co-authored with Justin Richardson, was an American Library Association Notable Book, a Henry Bergh Award winner, and has either headed or been on the ALA'S Top Ten List of Most Banned Books from 2006-2012.

Parnell has served on the Literary Award Committee of PEN, and has taught writing at Dartmouth, the New School, Columbia, the Yale School of Drama, and currently at NYU. He proudly serves as Vice-President of The Dramatists Guild.



ALAN
MENKEN

Music

Alan Menken is one of only 17 people to have won an Oscar, a Grammy award, a Tony award and an Emmy. He is the only person to have won all four and a Razzie, a satirical award, for a song from the 1992 movie musical *Newsies*. Like his collaborator in *Hunchback*, Stephen Schwartz, it is hard to do justice to his career in a few hundred words. He has actually won eight Academy Awards and eleven Grammys as well as his Tony and Emmy. The 73-year-old New Yorker is best known for his scores and songs for Disney films and shows including *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Home on the Range*, *Hercules*, *Newsies*, *Enchanted*, *Tangled*, *Disenchanted* and, of course *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

While his association with Disney dates back to 1989, Menken already had a huge stage hit with *Little Shop of Horrors* in 1982 written with the late Howard Ashman. He has also had hits with *A Christmas Carol* in 1994, *King David* in 1997 and the musical version of *Sister Act* in 2009. Apart from Schwartz and Ashman, Menken has collaborated with some of the biggest names in musical theatre including Tim Rice, Lynn Ahrens, Glen Slater and David Zippel.



STEPHEN
SCHWARTZ

Lyrics

Stephen Schwartz, who turned 75 on Monday, is one of only two composers/lyricists to have had three shows chalk up 1,500 performances on Broadway. He is best known as the creator of the behemoth 2003 musical *Wicked*, which has long since grossed \$1bn in New York and will shortly pass 7,500 performances becoming the fourth longest running musical there. However, a young Schwartz had taken American theatre by storm in 1971 with *Godspell* but it was *Pippin* in 1972 and 1974's *The Magic Show* which first broke that 1,500 barrier. His career can be broken into two halves. *The Baker's Wife*, *Working* and *Rags* close out that early burst before his next major musical, *Children of Eden* in 1991.

Collaboration with Alan Menken on Disney's animations of *Pocahontas* and *the Hunchback of Notre Dame* followed in 1995 and 1996 before he wrote songs for Dreamworks' 1998 animation *The Prince of Egypt* which was tuned into a stage musical in 2017. He wrote *Mit Eventyr* (My Fairy Tale), in 2005 to celebrate the bicentennial of Hans Christian Andersen's birth while a return to Menken resulted in Disney's *Enchanted* in 2007 and its sequel *Disenchanted*. His awards include three Oscars, four Grammy Awards, and a special Tony Award.

SOMEDAY
LIFE WILL BE KINDER
LOVE WILL BE BLINDER
SOME NEW AFTERNOON
GOD SPEED
THIS BRIGHT MILLENNIUM
HOPE LIVES ON
WISH UPON THE MOON
LET IT COME
ONE DAY...
SOMEDAY
SOON...

Someday
Life will be kinder
Love will be blinder
Some new afternoon
God speed
This bright millennium
hope lives on
Wish upon the moon
let it come
one day
someday
soon

THE TEAM

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| CLAUDE FROLLO | Boyd Rodgers |
| JEHAN FROLLO | David Baillie |
| CLOPIN TROUILLEFOU | Corey Magee |
| QUASIMODO | Conor Anderson |
| PHOEBUS DE MARTIN | David McCrossan |
| FREDERIC CHARLUS | Daniel Clarke |
| ESMERALDA | Naomi Smyth |
| FLORIKA | Lauren Toner |
| MADAM | Sarah McLaughlin |
| FATHER DUPIN | Kevin McIlhennon |
| ST APHRODISUS | Darryl Bowden |

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Jordan McFarlane, Emma McCourt, Emily McGleenon, Megan Pentland
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David Baillie, Donald Montgomery-Bugel, James Marsden, Adam Callendar,
Kevin McIlhennon, Taylor Clarke, Alice Tate, Conal Corr, Ellie Bamford,
Jessica Clouting, Daniel Clarke, Claire McRoberts, Shane Farell, Sharon Murray,
Gary Redpath, Diane Richardson, Ty Williams, Susan Taylor,
Michael Bradley, Alex Jemphrey

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James Hyde, Karen Glass, Laura Kerr, Aideen Fox, Shirley Adair, Cheryl Weston,
Alanna Patterson, Jenna McCready

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MUSICAL DIRECTOR
CHOREOGRAPHER

Kerry Rodgers
Adam Darcy
Timothy Bell

PRODUCTION MANAGER
STAGE MANAGER
STAGE CREW

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Maree Cusack
Eric McClure, Colin Mcroberts, Chris Thompson,
Johnny McRoberts, David Hamilton, Colin Boyd
Valerie Greenlee

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PROPS TEAM
WARDROBE MIUSTRESS
WARDROBE TEAM

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Emily Pentland
Maree Robinson, Anne Blackshaw,
Bobbi Manson, Hannah Beattie, Rosemary Kelly
Aine McConvey, Victoria Magowan
Rachael McKnight, Alli McKeever
Jordan Rosborough

MIC FITTERS
MAKE UP

PROGRAMME DESIGN
EDITORIAL
LIGHTING DESIGN
SOUND DESIGN

Gary Redpath
Robyn Banks
ACK Productions
NIAVAC

SET
COSTUMIER
CUSTOM COSTUMES

Scenic Projects
Triple C
Made by Emily Pentland

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St Aphrodisius Puppet made by Rachel Goudy

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THE STAFF OF THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE

Jessica Haughton, Victoria Magowan
David Magowan, Jordan McFarlane
Shane Berger, Kevin McIlhennon

FLUTE
CLARINET/SAX
OBOE
HORN
TRUMPET
TROMBONE
KEYBOARD
DRUMS/PERCUSSION
VIOLIN
VIOLA
CELLO

Andrew Douglas
Kevin Lawless, Gillian McCutcheon
Paul McCrisken
Charlie Doughert
Phil Ferguson, Hannah Murray
Jimmy Kitchen
Gary Myles, Andrew Robinson
Jeremy Hoy
Dervilagh Cooper, Una Donnelly
Davy Campbell
Kerry Brady

THE STORY

Orphaned brothers Jehan and Claude Frollo have grown up at Notre Dame. The worldly Jehan was expelled from the Cathedral after being caught with a gypsy woman while the pious Frollo rose to become Archdeacon of the church. On his deathbed Jehan gives his deformed baby to Frollo who prepares to kill the child but suddenly feels he is being tested by God. He saves the child, names him Quasimodo (half formed) and raises him in Notre Dame. ("The Bells of Notre Dame").

By 1542 the adult Quasimodo is partially deaf by a lifetime of ringing the cathedral bells. He talks to Notre Dame's statues about wanting to go to the Feast of Fools. Frollo reminds him statues cannot talk before complaining about Paris' gypsies and the Feast of Fools. Quasimodo offers to protect him at the event but Frollo declines,

warning him that he would be shunned in public.

Quasimodo, yearning to spend one day outside Notre Dame sings (Out There). Gypsy king Clopin opens The Feast, (Topsy Turvy). Meanwhile Captain Phoebus, the Cathedral Guards' new chief arrives in Paris where Frollo implores him to rid the city of gypsies (Rest and Recreation). Clopin introduces gypsy dancer Esmerelda, (Rhythm of the Tambourine) who entrances Quasimodo, Frollo and Phoebus. Esmerelda encourages Quasimodo to enter the King of Fools contest to crown the ugliest person in Paris but when he wins he is humiliated by citizens. She rescues him before Frollo takes him back to Notre Dame.

Esmerelda, who has followed them, is found by Frollo but after a confrontation he

allows her to stay. Esmerelda prays for the less fortunate (God Help The Outcasts). Phoebus finds Esmerelda, they argue, telling her not to fight unwinnable battles.

Esmerelda befriends Quasimodo, (Top of The World) and he rings the bells for her angering Frollo who is shocked at finding Esmerelda still there. He offers her shelter in order to save her soul but she rejects his advances.

Infuriated, Frollo orders Phoebus to escort her from Notre Dame and arrest her if she sets foot in it again. Frollo tells Quasimodo she is dangerous and sent from Hell but the Archdeacon roams the streets at night in search of her. Eventually he discovers Esmerelda partying with Phoebus (Tavern Song). In the bell tower Quasimodo reflects on the couple and how he never thought himself

worthy of love until meeting Esmerelda (Heaven's Light). Frollo prays, begging the Virgin Mary to save him either by condemning Esmerelda to Hell or giving her to him (Hellfire) then asks King Louis XI for and receives special powers to stop a gypsy witch and protect Paris.

His hunt for Esmerelda leads him to a brothel known for hiding gypsies. When its owner pleads ignorance Frollo tells Phoebus to burn it down. When Phoebus refuses Frollo orders his arrest, Esmerelda appears and a fight breaks out. Frollo stabs Phoebus and frames Esmerelda but she uses a magic trick to escape. As Frollo searches, Quasimodo grows worried about her whereabouts (Esmerelda).

ACT TWO

Esmerelda returns to Notre Dame to ask Quasimodo to hide Phoebus. She gives Quasimodo a woven band which he deciphers as a map and resolves to help her (Flight Into Egypt). A guard informs on Esmerelda leading Frollo to tell Quasimodo they will capture her.

Quasimodo and Phoebus try to warn the gypsies (Rest and Recreation reprise) who attempt to kill them but Esmerelda saves them (Court

of Miracles). As the gypsies prepare to leave, Phoebus asks Esmerelda to go with her. As they express their love Quasimodo looks on broken hearted (Heaven's Light reprise/In a Place of Miracles). Frollo arrests everyone except Clopin who manages to escape. The Archdeacon then locks Quasimodo in the bell tower. Frollo tells Esmerelda he can save her if she accepts being with him. When she refuses he threatens Phoebus' life and attempts to rape her, (Sanctuary reprise). He halts when Esmerelda cries out allowing her to have a final conversation with Phoebus. Phoebus pleads for her to accept Frollo's offer but she refuses. They yearn for a better future, (Someday) while in the bell tower statues encourage Quasimodo to free himself and save Esmerelda. Quasimodo angrily denounces them declaring he will remain stoic until he dies (Made of Stone). At dawn Esmerelda is tied to a pyre outside Notre Dame, sentenced to death by Frollo who offers her one last chance to save herself which she angrily rejects. Quasimodo swings down on a rope from the bell tower and takes Esmerelda back to the Cathedral invoking Notre Dame's statues as a sanctuary in an appeal for

protection. Frollo orders the Cathedral Guard to re-take the church by force. Clopin frees Phoebus and they rally Parisians against the Guards, however, the Guards still manage to break in. Quasimodo dumps molten lead for fixing the bells onto them. Esmerelda thanks Quasimodo for being a good friend before dying from smoke inhalation.

Frollo enters and Quasimodo broken heartedly confirms her death. Relieved, Frollo tells Quasimodo they are finally free of her poison before Quasimodo throws him off the bell tower to his death. Devastated, Quasimodo realises everyone he has ever loved is now dead. Phoebus arrives and finds out about Esmerelda's death. He tries to carry her body away but is unable to due to his injuries. Quasimodo then carries her away. Years later two skeletons are discovered in the crypts of Notre Dame, one holding the other in its arms – the former has a woven band around its neck and the other has a crooked spinal column. When it was attempted to detach the two, the latter crumbles to dust. The company finally addresses the audience with the question (What Makes a Monster and What Makes Man?).

THE CAST



CONOR
ANDERSON

Quasimodo

Conor Anderson trained in Musical Theatre at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, during training Conor played roles such as Eddie Birlace in *Dogfight*, Iago in *Othello* and Ensemble in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*.

After graduating, Conor performed in the off West End production of *Imagine This* as well as playing Chase in the UK and international tour of *Paw Patrol Live*.

Conor now lives in Belfast where he works as a Choreographer and Performing Arts Tutor. Quasimodo is a dream role of Conor's and he is delighted to be playing the part in his first Belfast Operatic Company production.



DAVID
MCCROSSAN

Captain Phoebeus

This is David's first show with Belfast Operatic Company and he couldn't be more excited to tread the boards of the Grand Opera House stage once again. David has previously performed in the Grand Opera House as Tony in *West Side Story* and Riff in *West Side Story* with New Lyric Operatic

Company, as well as Johnny Casino in *Grease* with Ulster Operatic Company. Prior to this, David played The Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* in the Royal Harrogate Theatre and with Fusion Theatre Lisburn, for which he came runner-up in the 'Best Male Singer' category at the Association of Irish Musical Societies' Awards. He achieved similar success playing the part of 'Thomas' in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Boys in the Photograph*, receiving the runner-up's prize in the 'Best Actor in a Supporting Role' category. David lives in Hillsborough with his wife Susan and two dogs, and would like to dedicate his performance to them and the rest of his family for their continued support. Enjoy the show and 'Fichez le camp'!



BOYD
RODGERS

Claude Frolo

Boyd has been performing throughout Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K for many years. His theatre credits include *Ghost the Musical* (Sam Wheat, Ulster Operatic Company), *West Side Story* (Tony, Belfast Music and Drama Society), *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* (Prince Charming, University of Massachusetts), *Les Misérables* (Jean Valjean,

Fusion Theatre), *The Phantom of the Opera* (Monsieur Firmin), amongst a host of other productions. Additionally, Boyd has appeared as a soloist in the Waterfront Hall as part of Peter Corrys Music Box and was under the tutelage of vocal coach Ashley Fulton for many years attaining three diplomas (DipLCM, ALCM, LLCM) in musical theatre performance from the London College of Music. Professionally Boyd has performed in Castle Ward Opera's *Carmen* and additionally in the BBC's televised opera *The Little Prince*, which he further performed in The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London.

Boyd is excited to bring the role of Claude Frolo to life in what will be his debut as a show's villain and his first show with Belfast Operatic Company. He thanks BOC for the opportunity and thoroughly hopes you enjoy the show.



NAOMI SMYTH

Esmeralda

Naomi was born in Portaferry, County Down and is a Senior Support Worker/House Administrator for a charity that supports adults with learning difficulties.

As a performer Naomi has sung with RPNI Events, Singers Secreto, PCP Productions and several societies and companies around Northern Ireland. Favourite roles on stage include Fantine (*Les Miserables*), Kath (*Our House*), Anita (*West Side Story*), Sandy (*Grease*), Miss Hannigan (*Annie*), Candy (*Whistle Down The Wind*) and Eva Peron in *Evita* in such venues as the Grand Opera House, Great Hall Downpatrick and The MAC. Naomi has been nominated for Best Female Singer at the annual A.I.M.S awards and continues her vocal studies with international operatic bass Graeme Danby.



COREY MAGEE

Clopin Trouillefou

Corey is delighted to be making his debut in the Grand Opera House. He joined BOC in 2020 and has since been involved in several concerts and shows, most recently playing the role of Nick Carraway in the company's dynamic production 'A Night At Gatsby's'. Corey has been involved in drama and theatre

since a young age. His passion for theatre and music continued over the years and has led him to achieve diplomas in speech and drama, classical singing and musical theatre performance, as well as grade 8 piano and clarinet. Despite working as a doctor, he maintains that it is worth balancing the intense schedule so that he can continue to experience the thrill that comes from performing. Notable roles include Javert in *Les Miserables* and Pontius Pilate in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Corey has thoroughly enjoyed the rehearsal process for this show and developing the character of Clopin. He has enjoyed delving into the complexity of his character, hoping that his portrayal will address the show's themes from a few different perspectives, and that audiences will not only be able to enjoy the thrilling music and timeless story but also take home the important messages of acceptance and compassion that are embedded within the show's material. He wants to welcome you to the feast of fools and hopes that you will have a Topsy-Turvy time!

THE OTHER

This retelling of Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is built on the conventions of story theatre, presenting a great opportunity for a highly involved ensemble of characters. The ensemble play all sorts, from Gypsies to Parishioners and Gargoyles, and each ensemble member takes on the role of multiple characters. The piece therefore depends on each performer who plays an integral part in the overall story and how it is told on stage.

Through the show, congregants must convey difficult themes based around inclusion, diversity, and disability. Themes which were relevant to the show's time period remain hugely relevant to this day in a modern context, and must be handled with great delicacy. Schwartz, Menken and Parnell have used story theatre to make this as exploratory as possible in a respectful manner, allowing the cast to explore the themes in the context of both the show and current day. The Roma, Women and those with disabilities all would have been treated as 'the other' at the time, and like Quasimodo, the Roma would live on the fringes of Parisian society, treated as outcasts.

In story theatre, narration plays a large part, guiding the audience through the story, however there is no one designated narrator.

Instead each ensemble member contributes their talents to the overall show, working together to unfold the story of the Hunchback before the audience's eyes - which includes changes in setting, mood and intention.

A lot of what the show is about is how we deal with the "other" - things or people that feel foreign or scary or don't fit comfortably into our world view. The Gypsies (Roma) are a people that are "other" to Parisian society, whilst not having any visible disability, they are representing a kind of danger to Frollo and the Church. This is continued through the story's representation of women, and the "free-spirited" Esmeralda who is both demonised through male desire, and objectified by the same male characters.

As with everything in this story, no group is all good or all bad. There is light and dark in all people, and the ensemble challenge and ask the audience to question what exactly it is that makes a monster and what makes a man. All Hugos characters have been written to be morally challenging, and this carries through the tones of the show via the storytelling of the ensemble - in this adaptation there is no Disney hero or villain.

THE PRODUCTION TEAM



**KERRY
RODGERS**

Director

Kerry graduated with a MA in Making Performance from Edge Hill University, where she wrote and directed an original piece of theatre. After graduating Kerry moved back home to Belfast where she now works full time as a freelance director and performing arts tutor. Directing credits include 'Godspell', 'Bonnie & Clyde' and 'Sister Act'. Kerry works with a number of performing arts schools across northern Ireland including Ravara Productions, where she most recently directed their production of *Little Shop of Horrors* at The Mac Theatre, Belfast. This is Kerry's first time working with Belfast Operatic Company, she has loved her time directing their production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and is excited to be bringing this story to audiences in Belfast.



**ADAM
DARCY**

*Musical
Director*

Adam is a Belfast-based Musical Director, Vocal Coach and Pianist with over 12 years experience in music and theatre. Adam has conducted and played for numerous musical theatre productions and concerts, including a number of Irish and Northern Irish premieres; 'In the Heights', 'Godspell' (Broadway Revival), 'Pippin', 'Into the Woods' and 'Spring Awakening'.

Adam is constantly in demand working with private students, theatre groups, ensembles and schools across Northern Ireland. He is the co-founder and resident MD of youth theatre company, Ravara Productions and currently works with Pophouse Arts, The Belfast School of Performing Arts, MMK Productions and has been MD on the Belvoir Players Summer Project since its inception, 10 years ago. He continues to study Estill Voice Training under renowned vocal coach, Anne-Marie Speed at 'The Voice Explained'.

Most recently Adam was Musical Director and arranger on a new series of concerts, 'Northern Lights' for Peter Corry Productions. Adam is looking forward to returning to the Grand Opera House with Belfast Operatic Company, bringing to life the incredible music and lyrics of Menken and Schwartz!



**TIMOTHY
BELL**

Choreographer

Timmy's stage experience began at the age of 4 with McMaster Stage School, Bangor, with whom he now teaches and choreographs.

Theatre: Over the years he has performed and choreographed with numerous societies and youth theatres in the North including the NI premiere productions of *The Addams Family* and *9to5* the musical and *Curtains*, all with Newcastle Glees.

Timothy has worked on workshops in Dublin with Festival Productions and choreographed outreach projects with Youth Music Theatre UK. He has also worked with the National Youth Theatre, Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, Churchhill Theatre, Bromley, GBL productions & Qdos Productions. Timmy has been the assistant choreographer for the Grand Opera House Youth Productions for the past 10 years and was very privileged to have choreographed a summer youth performance for King Charles III visit to the Grand Opera House in 2022.

Timmy has enjoyed playing many numerous roles, winning the Association of Irish Musical Society award for Best Supporting Male in 2006 for his role of Will Parker in *Oklahoma!*. Timothy has thoroughly enjoyed working with BOC and choreographing Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, having previously choreographed *A Christmas Carol*, *The Addams Family*, *Sister Act*, and *Jekyll and Hyde* in the Grand Opera House and the company's 'Westend to Broadway' and 'Broadway to the Silver Screen' Concerts in the Ulster Hall, as well as *ELF the musical* in the Waterfront Hall.

TV: Assistant choreographer on BBC's World on Fire series 2 (Mammoth Screen).



**CAROLE
MCCLURE**

*Production
Manager*

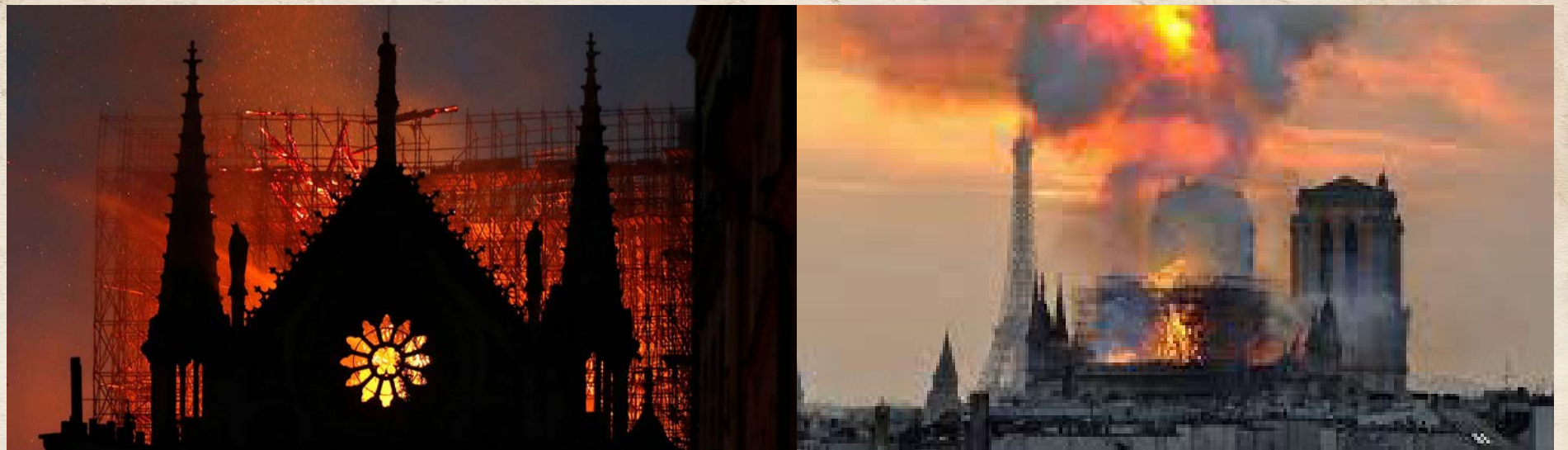
Carole joined Belfast Operatic Company in 1996 and has been involved as a chorus member, dancer, Vice Chairman, Chairman and from 2000 Production Manager for the Company. She is very proud that along with her husband Eric they have recently been awarded Life Membership of the Company in recognition of their contribution to productions for over 20 years.

She is delighted to be working with the Production Team for this innovative production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. A show that requires the Company involved to embrace a completely fresh style of performance under the vision and direction of Kerry Rodgers and the Choreographer Tim Bell alongside the Musical Direction of Adam Darcy. The Production Team are exceptionally proud of the cast who have risen to the challenge of a show that deals with both prejudice and disability told sensitively and involving beautiful and challenging music.

Carole brings a wealth of experience to her role of Production Manager with a background in amateur dramatics, 42 years of teaching involving musical productions and latterly in the field of Special Education. She would like to thank the Grand Opera House Technical Team, all outside Technical Teams involved and the BOC backstage teams. All have a vital role to play in bringing a production to performance.

Carole would also like to express her thanks to the Committee for their continued support and trust, the cast for their valued commitment, cooperation and patience and the Production Team for their demanding work, support, friendship and laughter. The journey from auditions to performance week has been an absolute joy.

THE BLAZE



At 6.20pm on April 15, 2019, Notre-Dame Cathedral was alight. Firefighters arrived 30 minutes later and 400 of them fought a three hour battle to bring the blaze under control.

By that time the spire had collapsed and the roof badly damaged. However, the stone vaulted ceiling protected the interior of the building from significant damage.

Around 100 Government officials also rushed to the scene to remove valuable objects from the building. Three emergency workers were injured during the fire but no one died. It would be twelve hours before the Fire Brigade reported that the fire had been completely extinguished.

At the time of the blaze the roof truss and crossing tower were being renovated and

part of the building was under scaffolding. A guard had checked the church following a fire alarm and found nothing. However, minutes later the error was discovered with the resulting blaze lighting up the Parisian evening sky.

While investigations have found no evidence of arson, the fire spread rapidly because the roof timbers were so old and dry. An electrical short circuit is believed to have sparked the blaze.

International financial support for the restoration of the building poured in almost immediately. More than \$10.5m was raised in 2019 alone by more than 10,500 donors from around the world. And a safety phase aimed at protecting the building from the elements started a few months later after burnt and melted scaffolding which had

surrounded the spire had been removed and surveys had been conducted. So far that phase alone has cost around €170m.

Apart from saving the structure from rainwater and lead decontamination, it aimed to fortify the north, south and west gables to protect three large rose windows, strengthen the most damaged pillars of the nave and to wrap the gargoyles and others sculptures of the north and south towers.

The spire and the majority of the roof were destroyed. "The Forest", the lattice of ancient wooden beams in the attic, was also lost. The walls of the nave, choir and two transepts suffered severe water damage leaving them structurally unsound and although the north tower belfry was partially burned,

the bells were still in place. Incredibly, beehives installed on the roof of Notre Dame in 2013, survived the fire as they had been located 30 metres away from the main roof. The cathedral's famous organ was saved although damaged by water and from lead that had melted from the roof during the blaze.

Work began on the restoration of the organ in late August, 2020, with the removal of its five-keyboard console and the dismantling of its 8,000 pipes. Each will be cleaned and restored until the instrument can be re-assembled. Tuning alone is expected to take six months.

Initially the goal of April, 2024, was set for the finishing of the work. That was in line with the declaration of French President Emmanuel Macron that the Cathedral should

be open to worshippers and visitors by 2024. He had hoped the building would be open to the public before the 2024 Olympic Games due to the be staged in the city at the end of July and beginning of August.

However, while the square to the west of the building and the archaeological crypt beneath it as well as the famous bridge, the Pont au Double, are already open to the public, it is unlikely the Cathedral will now re-open until the end of 2024. A date of December 8, - the Feast of the Immaculate Conception - is the revised target.

While the full restoration of the building will take much longer, a new spire, identical to the one designed by 19th Century architect Eugene Viollet-le-Duc and destroyed in the fire, is scheduled to be back in place by the end of

this year.

Fortunately the massive statues of the saints and apostles that adorned the previous spire had been removed for restoration a few days before the devastating blaze. They will return to their previous home - albeit in a new structure.

Notre Dame was constructed in stages between 1163 and 1345. It has been the setting of many historic events being desecrated during the French revolution, acting as the site for Napoleon's coronation while in 1944 Parisians celebrated the liberation of the city from the Nazis at the Cathedral.

In 2017 it was estimated that 12 million people visited the building, making it twice as popular as the Eiffel Tower with tourists

THE ANATOMY OF A SHOW

There's no business like show business and, increasingly, managing a musical society is like running a small business. We are an amateur company with everyone onstage and most of those working behind the scenes giving up their time voluntarily. To ensure production standards are as high as possible within our budget we also employ the services of several theatre professionals. There's a lot that goes on in a typical Belfast Operatic year but our highest public profile comes during the week of a show. Here's our shorthand guide to staging what is often the highlight of our year.

CHOOSING A SHOW

Securing the rights to a show that fits in with the Grand Opera House's schedule, meets the theatre's production values and stands a chance of selling to the public can be a protracted and complex affair for the group's committee – especially with parts of the theatre's calendar often in place two years in advance - with several possible choices often considered. And, of course matters have been muddled somewhat by the Covid-19 pandemic

and the subsequent backlog of productions being worked on prior to 2020. Dates for this run were agreed in autumn 2020 while the rights for the show were finally acquired in July 2021. Opera House productions are a big undertaking for amateur musical societies involving huge financial risk with costs that run well into six figures.

CHOOSING A PRODUCTION TEAM

In 63 years our creative teams have remained remarkably consistent, fostering a club-like atmosphere. In that time only eleven people have directed our shows with six of those having very strong connections to the Company. Nine musical directors have been at the helm of our shows with six being members of the group before they took up the baton. Of the current team, choreographer Timothy Bell is the veteran although he has only worked with us since 2014. Musical director Adam Darcy has been with us since 2020 while director Kerry Rodgers is making her debut with us in *Hunchback*.

PLANNING THE PRODUCTION

When a show gets the green light, a budget is set by the Company's officials at a meeting with production manager Carole McClure. In the case of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* that meeting took place in October, 2021. Carole then sat down with the show's creative team to plan the show in detail, outlining the overall style of the production, examining settings, lighting, sound, costumes and make-up and drawing up a prospective rehearsal schedule before firming up decisions in a series of further meetings in the spring.

REHEARSING THE SHOW

A total of 150 man hours has gone into getting *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* from page to stage starting in earnest in March, 2022, with musical rehearsals under Adam and continuing with dance and drama sessions under Timothy and Kerry. All the work was carried out at the Company's own Heron Road rehearsal studio, which mirrors the height, width and depth of the Opera House stage. Up to three sessions a week were the order of the day from late spring for the creative team as they worked with both the ensemble and individual principals.

PUTTING BUMS ON SEATS

A sold-out Christmas concert at the Ulster Hall early last December saw 1,200 people get the first glimpse of *The*

Hunchback of Notre Dame through an excerpt from the musical. The Opera House had already included advance notice of the production in its seasonal booklets before the Company's marketing team launched its own drive through a social media campaign last autumn. Press and broadcast media campaigns were conducted from early this year.

A FRANTIC WEEKEND

Putting the final touches to the production is often a nerve jangling 72 hours with only limited get-in time available to us. Saturday morning's final Heron Road rehearsal was followed by a last costume fitting by the wardrobe team while Adam Darcy ran through the score with his orchestra. Sunday morning saw access to the theatre with the stage team building the set which arrived from England on Saturday before Kerry Rodgers started setting her lighting and sound plots ahead of a first run through on the set for the cast. Monday night's dress rehearsal was the last chance to get things right before curtain up on Tuesday.

REVIEWING THE SITUATION

A committee meeting examining the production artistically and financially is scheduled to be held early in April. It will also refine plans for our production of Andrew Lloyd Webber *The Phantom of the Opera* at the Theatre at the Mill, Newtownabbey in May next year, a choice that was first announced in December, 2022.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame will be Belfast Operatic's 164th stage production. Key dates in its history are:

1960 First show Patience staged at First Ballymacarrett Presbyterian church hall, Paulett Avenue, Belfast

1981 Debut at Belfast's former Arts Theatre at Botanic with a double bill of Trial By Jury and The Pirates of Penzance

1982 First pantomime, Aladdin, staged at the former Group Theatre

1988 Bought first property, a former set of Masonic Halls at the Mount, Belfast

1988 Grand Opera House debut with The Pirates of Penzance

1991 HMS Pinafore performed in a huge marquee at Craigavad as part of the initial Tall Ships festival.

2009 Bought and customised the group's current headquarters at Heron Road, Belfast.

Other notable facts are:

Belfast Operatic's victory at the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera in 1980 means they are the last Northern Ireland group to hold the title.

The Company has staged 26 shows at the Grand Opera House including two Irish premieres, Titanic in 2005 and Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella in 2014. The group has even staged a show in Scotland during a weekend visit to Stranraer in 1976 as well as several major concerts in venues in the Republic.

It was initially known as Ballymacarrett Musical Society and linked to First Ballymacarrett Presbyterian Church. The group changed its name not once but twice within a few months in the mid-1960s after breaking the link with the church becoming Ballymacarrett Operatic Society for a short period before settling on Belfast Operatic Company.

Belfast Operatic Company has come a long way since it was founded as the Ballymacarrett Musical Society in 1960 by John Mercer.

In the intervening years the Company has staged almost 150 major productions – both stage shows and major concerts – in many of Ireland's high profile venues. Those productions are rehearsed at the Company's custom-built home at Heron Road in the Sydenham Industrial Park, close to both Belfast Lough and the city's George Best Airport. The group is one of only a the handful of musical societies in Ireland, north or south, to own its own property. The Company moved to the site in 2009 although it was not officially opened until a visit by Broadway composer Maury Yeston, the composer of the musical Titanic, in 2012. He had travelled from his Manhattan home for a midnight performance of the show timed to coincide with the centenary of one of the greatest maritime tragedies in mankind's history. The George Moore Centre, named after a former long-standing Chairman and President, boasts a rehearsal room designed to mimic the dimensions of the stage of the Grand Opera House among its many features.

Although the Company has more than 100 singers from all over Northern Ireland on its books, it often holds auditions to uncover new talent.

If you are interested in joining you can contact Gary Redpath at secretary@belfastoperatic.co.uk or by post at the George Moore Centre, 22 Heron Road, Belfast BT3 9LE. Alternatively keep an eye on the Company's website, Facebook page or Twitter account.

There's no business like show business according to Irving Berlin. Thousands of Ulster theatregoers will agree with the famous composer but what he forgot to mention was the cost of it all.

Putting on a show, particularly a musical, is a costly affair as Belfast Operatic officials know only too well. By the time the group's treasurer Liz Boyd settles the accounts and pays the bills in the next six weeks, she will have forked out around £150,000 on behalf of the Company.

While the group is amateur it's the price it pays as the cost of keeping up with the professionals.

"Glance at any Grand Opera House season brochure and you will find more than half of its programme consists of musicals, said Belfast Operatic secretary Gary Redpath. "The theatre has access to some of the biggest and most popular shows on the UK and Ireland circuit. That means we are often sandwiched in between professional touring productions and have to splash the cash to avoid unfavourable comparisons.

"While we are an amateur group and don't pay anyone to perform, we are now spending more and more money on the technical support that big musicals need to make them as good as we possibly can," Redpath added. "We are conscious that while we have our own following who would come to see us perform in a much smaller venue, many people who come to see our Grand Opera House shows don't readily understand that they are coming to an amateur production. "They are attracted by the title, not necessarily by our reputation, so we have to ensure that they get as good a night out as we can give them and hopefully make a big enough impression to attract them back to see us."

The Hunchback of Notre Dame is the latest in a series of premieres from Belfast Operatic Company, the majority of which have been performed in the last couple of decades.

However, the trend was set back in 1967 when the Company's founder, John Mercer, acquired the rights to stage the Northern Ireland amateur premiere of Orpheus in the Underworld at a time when the group exclusively staged operettas and opera.

It was not until 2005 that the group would chalk up another first with the Irish premiere of the Tony award winning musical Titanic. When composer Maury Yeston heard of the plan to stage his work only a mile away from where the most famous ship in the history of the world was built, he came to Belfast for the opening performance of the work.

He repeated the journey seven years later when the Company staged the show to mark the centenary of the ship's only voyage. Over the next few years Company staged a couple of shows with which Yeston was familiar with on New York's Broadway, close to his home.

A Christmas Carol, staged at the Grand Opera House in 2013, was a Northern Ireland premiere. And in 2014 at the same venue the Broadway version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella was an Irish premiere.

Three more recent premieres also saw the Company perform in other Belfast venues. Elf the Musical in 2018 was staged at the Waterfront Hall, while The Greatest Show in 2019 and A Night at Gatsby's 2022, works written by the Company's Gary Redpath were mounted respectively at the MAC and the Hilton Hotel.

Belfast Operatic Company is back in familiar territory this week at the Grand Opera House. It's the 27th time the group has staged a show at the province's premier venue since our debut here in 1988. The theatre has hosted more than twice as many of our productions as any other arena.

The much-missed Arts Theatre, once the centrepiece of Belfast's Botanic area, is second in that table. We staged 13 shows there from 1981 when a production not only marked the group's 21st anniversary but also its return to Belfast city centre.

From its founding in 1960 the Company performed shows in Belfast for a decade, first at the Lecture Hall at First Ballymacarrett Presbyterian Church at Paulett Avenue then at the long since demolished King George VI Youth Centre in May Street. Much of the 1970s saw Belfast Operatic perform outside the city because of the effects of the civil disturbances. Shows were staged at Newtownards' Queen's Hall, Bangor's Little Theatre – another venue sadly missed – assorted school and church halls as well as some of Northern Ireland's finest provincial theatres, including the Ardhoven in Enniskillen and Newry's Town Hall and even a show in Scotland at a time when the Company became increasingly nomadic.

Twelve appearances at Waterford's intimate Theatre Royal as part of the city's former Festival of Light Opera also span part of that time.

In more recent times shows have been staged at Derry's Millennium Forum, Belfast's Waterfront Hall, the city's Metropolitan Arts Centre and the Hilton Hotel. But the strangest venue has to be the Craigavad marquee which saw a version of HMS Pinafore performed as part of the 1991 Tall Ships Festival with an audience which included former Northern Ireland Office minister, Richard Needham, who sportingly joined in the action at one point.

Appropriately for a production about a love affair, Belfast Operatic Company can claim to be responsible for around 15 marriages or long term partnerships.

Those relationships range across the history of the Company with friendships struck up in rehearsals or in the wings of shows resulting in marriages lasting more than 50 years to more recent partnerships of the past decade. Indeed, some of the children of those relationships have, in turn, appeared on stage or on the concert platform with the group. It is a love of the stage as well as a desire to have fun which sees Belfast Operatic's membership drawn from all over the province and from all sorts of occupations.

The modern day group boasts a membership of more than 100 people, making it one of the largest musical societies in Ireland, north or south of the border. Increasingly in recent years the emphasis has been on staging big budget shows new to the city. While only part of the Company is on stage tonight, many recent shows have featured a cast list of between 70 to 90 people ranging in age from 8 to 80.

In relationships of a different kind, the Company is linked to other musical societies throughout the British Isles through its membership of umbrella bodies, the Peterborough-based National Operatic and Dramatic Association and the Association of Irish Musical Societies which is headquartered in Dublin. Three of the company's individuals have played significant roles with the latter both at regional and all-Ireland levels.

Belfast Operatic Company and its members were greatly saddened to learn of the loss of our dear member, Marion Taylor, in September 2022.

Marion was a model company member, always around to greet and welcome new members and wouldn't let you pass by without well wishing or asking after you. Always attending rehearsals with a smile on her face and brightening up the room with her sheer enthusiasm. Marion had been a company member for almost all the years of its existence, and is dearly missed by all in the company.



BELFAST OPERATIC COMPANY - PAST SHOWS

1961 PATIENCE / THE GONDOLIERS 1962 THE MIKADO 1963 IOLANTHE / PATIENCE
1964 PRINCESS IDA / THE MERRYMAN AND HIS MAID
(also known as The Yeomen of the Guard)
1965 THE MIKADO / THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE
1966 LA BELLE HELENE / COX AND BOX/
NOT IN FRONT OF THE WAITER/TRIAL BY JURY
1967 ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD (Irish premiere)/ IOLANTHE
NOT IN FRONT OF THE WAITER
1968 THE GONDOLIERS
THE BLIND BEGGARS/SUSANANNA'S SECRET/DIDO AND AENEAS
1969 CONCERT PROGRAMME 1970 PATIENCE
1971 PATIENCE (Northern Ireland Festival of Light Opera, Little Theatre, Bangor)
1972 TRIAL BY JURY/HMS PINAFORE/ THE MIKADO
1973 THE MIKADO 1974 THE WHITE HORSE INN
1975 LA PERICHOLE 1976 THE GONDOLIERS / THE MIKADO
1977 THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE / THE GONDOLIERS
1978 THE BOHEMIAN GIRL in conjunction with Studio Opera Group (Arts Theatre, Belfast)
THE BOHEMIAN GIRL (Carrickfergus and WIFLO)
1979 PRINCESS IDA / THE MIKADO
1980 IOLANTHE / ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD
1981 TRIAL BY JURY/ THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE / LA PERICHOLE
1982 THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD (Arts Theatre)
THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD (Newry Town Hall and WIFLO)
1983 PATIENCE (Little Theatre, Bangor) (Northern Ireland Festival of Light Opera winner)
1984 DIE FLEDERMAUS 1985 THE MERRY WIDOW / HMS PINAFORE
1986 LA VIE PARISIENNE 1987 THE GONDOLIERS / HMS PINAFORE
1988 ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD
THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE (Grand Opera House debut)
1989 THE MIKADO 1990 IOLANTHE
1991 FIDDLER ON THE ROOF 1992 THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE
1993 THE DESERT SONG 1994 OKLAHOMA!
1995 THE MIKADO 1996 THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE
1997 SHOW BOAT 1998 THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD
1999 HMS PINAFORE 2000 CALAMITY JANE
2001 BRIGADOON 2002 HELLO DOLLY! / TRIAL BY JURY
2003 KISS ME KATE HMS PINAFORE
2004 ANNIE GET YOUR GUN 2005 TITANIC
2006 FIDDLER ON THE ROOF / TITANIC
2007 GALA CONCERT (AIMS Choral Festival, St Michael's Theatre, New Ross)
GALA CONCERT with Peter Corry celebrating the centenary of the Scouting Movement
(Waterfront Hall, Belfast)
2008 ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD 2009 HELLO DOLLY!
2010 BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 2011 CALAMITY JANE
2012 TITANIC (100th anniversary commemoration)
2013 A CHRISTMAS CAROL 2014 CINDERELLA (Irish premiere)
2015 SISTER ACT 2016 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
2017 JEKYLL and HYDE 2018 ELF the Musical (Waterfront Hall, Belfast)
2019 THE GREATEST SHOW (Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast)
2021 A CHRISTMAS CAROL 2022 A NIGHT AT GATSBY'S (Hilton Hotel, Belfast)

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with The Really Useful Group Ltd.

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ADDITIONAL LYRICS BY Richard Stilgoe

BOOK BY
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MUSIC BY
ALAN MENKEN

LYRICS BY
STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

BOOK BY
PETER PARNELL

ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY DISNEY THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

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