



**WEAR**

8pm, 3rd August  
The Crossing, Central St Martins  
N1C 4AA

## Contents

3.....	Cast and Crew
4.....	Libretto
12.....	Interview
13.....	Biographies

WEAR  
a chamber opera

Tete-A-Tete Festival, London  
8pm, 3 August, 2018  
The Crossing

Words and Music by Alastair White  
Concept by Gemma. A Williams and Alastair White

The Designer: Kelly Poukens  
The Writer: Sarah Parkin  
The Model: Betty Makharinsky  
Reflection: Alana Everett  
Reflection: Max Gershon

Piano performed by Ben Smith

Fashion by Derek Lawlor  
Choreography by Alana Everett

Hair by Radio Hair Salon  
Make-up by AnnMarie Lawson

Directed by Gemma A. Williams and Alastair White

The Designer:

Hours of tiredness in the wet wool  
pressed to my eyes, wrapped by satin cloth.

Clasps of white bone cut into the light  
throwing blackness onto the lacquered floor  
in hours of autumn, after the parties  
the mountain's crystal drawing your breath short.

For hours not themselves so make you blind.  
Darkness to send fools and children dreams.  
In this alone, there's truth of correlation.  
Two unconnected things made violently alike.

Such days and days of sleeplessness have nights  
piled through one another like a woollen weave  
where hours realign and so contain their cruelty  
that nothing could be loud.

Where once was sound, see, it becomes  
the beating of wings at the window only  
swallows caught in the holly's gauze.

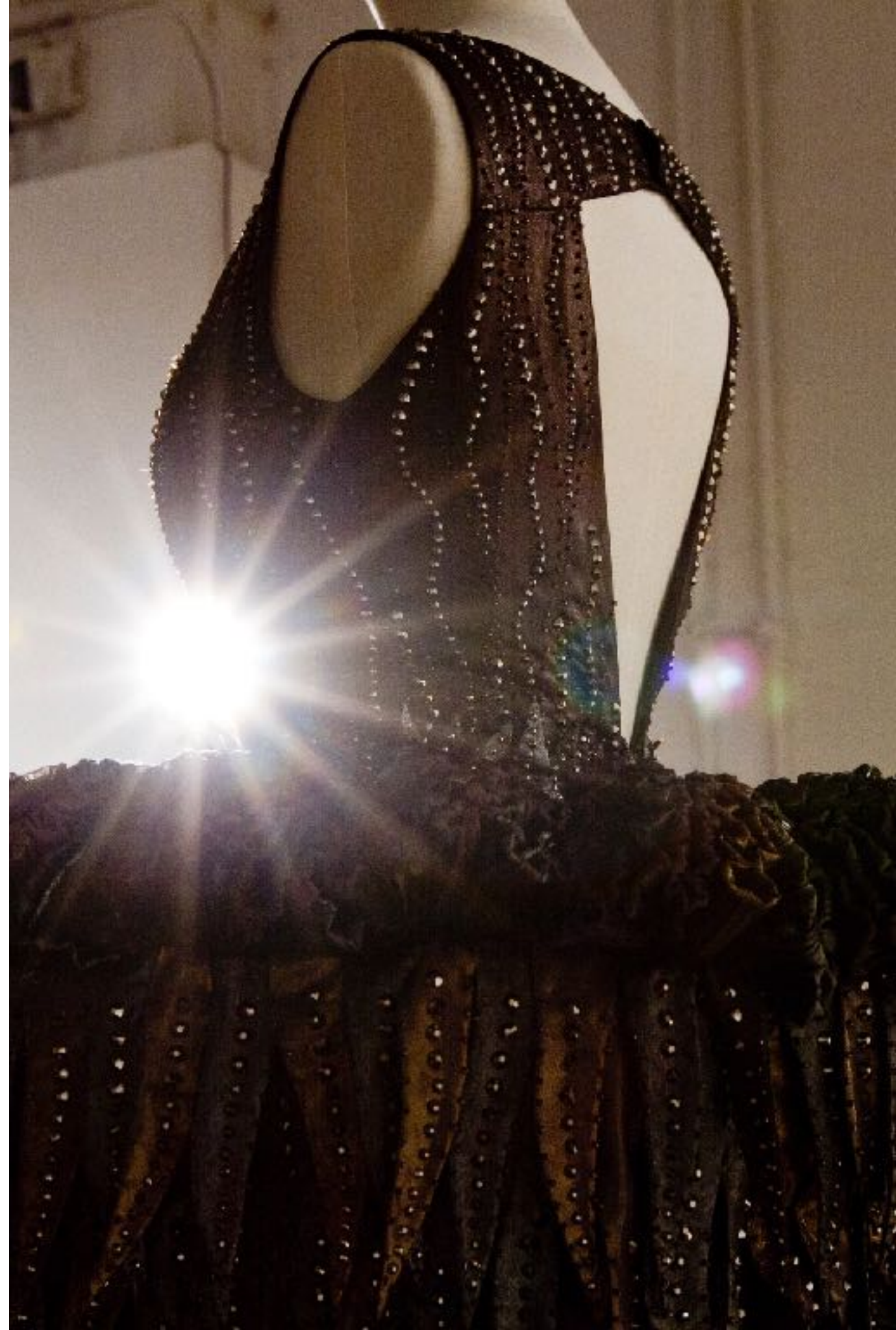
The sound of such things is memory only for those unchanged.  
In this way, woollen rags and mountain rain  
return, like plague carts, to call for grief  
where the light has ended  
there is reflection only.

The Writer:

What in god's name are they on about?  
They weren't always like this.

Anyway, hi.  
Hello.  
And you are?  
Where did you meet?  
Do you like the work?  
Are you eating enough?  
O, you are  
you are  
so young  
so beautiful  
so young.

Is there anyone there?  
Anyone?  
Are you still here?





The Designer:

The end of all things.  
Is that really you?

The Writer:

A figure  
a silhouette  
blurred around its edge.  
Don't all things pass?

The Designer:

It's true.  
It's so wonderful to see you...

The Writer:

No, it's not that.  
Not I.  
Not you.

The Designer:

...like the sickly colour of dreams  
the vertigo of deja-vu.

The Writer:

I've come to ask  
would you do me a favour:  
an interview?  
Though how different your work seems now.  
What happened?

The Designer:

You don't know how I've longed to see you.  
Yet don't I remember a ghou? A crow?  
Its teeth bright like the white stalks of empires,  
their marble ruins, their wreckage of sacked towns  
sinking through skin as though it were quicksand.

The Writer:

Perhaps.  
Though I'm sure I remember it differently.  
You were the one who moved on.

The Designer:

All things pass.

The Writer:

All things but the last.  
Just that first quantum flash,  
its claw mark's down our event horizon.  
All that any of us have.

The way that I remember you  
on that last awful day,  
your words like lists in a reference book:  
the cold unchanging cruelty of truth.



The Designer:

Then surely you remember  
the feeling of fabric as it hung against your neck?  
My broken Italian - we spoke about the stitching?  
The kids we danced with at the bar on the canal.  
And we - you and I - you and I...

It seems I can't remember.  
Everything's so confused.

The Writer:

Have you seen the news?  
The time machines.  
Something's happened.  
Have you seen the news?  
The time machines.  
Something's happened.

The Designer:

But the feeling itself I can see in my memory,  
cold and white as quartz or cryolite  
like truth - unchanging.

The Writer:

You aren't listening.  
They say it's all over.  
The papers are hysterical.  
They say we're all going...  
Something's happened.  
The time machines.

The Designer:

The same papers who were hysterical  
about the tentative initial regulation of the technology?  
There was one article I remember in particular.  
Shall I bring it up?

The Writer:

Please, please. Don't.  
Perhaps it was an opinion that needed to be expressed?  
It all seems so stupid.  
Why do we do what we do?

Both:

Like dumb salmon  
jumping miles of river  
to make love alone  
partitioned  
by the silence of the water  
to swap the dark of the water for the light of the weather gleam  
to search the squall of the current for the warmth of nests  
to be carried down  
to the long slow mouth  
indistinguishable  
somehow  
from the season they'd begun  
the net  
of effort pain  
and hatched eggs  
all to part  
from the space where they'd begun  
almost  
almost the same pink fish  
almost the same dark water  
almost  
almost the end  
almost  
the first day  
almost the end of all things  
the end of all things  
the end of all things

The Designer:

Did you ever use the technology?  
After everything you said?

The Writer:

Yes - of course - who didn't?  
But God! I used it for such stupid things,  
changing my outfit halfway through a date,  
back from the shop to get the right change.  
Fools! All of us!

The end of all things  
they say it started with a time machine.

The Designer:

You're right.  
I used it.  
Just once.  
I walked through the doors.

The Writer:

What did you do?  
What have you done?



The Designer:

Even if I wanted to  
I wouldn't change a thing.  
Look at the collection.  
What were those words you used?  
Cold. White. Unchanging.

The Writer:

“The cruelty of truth.”

The Model:

**Why?**

The Designer:

The welts in the weave of the whale-stitch,  
the dust and cobwebs thick upon the cuffs.  
The rot of oldness and of age,  
fly-cubs festering in the garments made  
only to be again unwoven  
to be again unmade.  
Funny! How love and hatred, so unpleasant and strange  
forge these processes like fired stone  
and safe in our minds they remain unchanged.

Both:

As that one time, when we sat upon the pier.  
We ate shellfish and drank dry cold beer.

I don't remember.

The Designer:

It's true.  
I don't know who you are.  
Like the sickly blackness of sleep,  
the vertigo of nothingness.

The Writer:

No, it was never that.  
Never I.  
Never you.  
Let me switch it on.  
One last time.  
Tell me about the fabrics,  
the materials.

It goes something like:  
“All things start with a time machine.”  
You know how it goes.  
We've both been here before.

The Designer:

All things.  
The end of all things.







Both:

All things start with a time machine  
that stepping through those doors you begin again  
paddling temporal streams like birth canals  
the world emerges newborn.  
And so, one by one, our countries filled with infants.  
Kids' strange and wobbling steps upon the cosmos  
flattened them.  
I was sickened by the change, the flux. The ground  
beneath us always realigned, always shifting.  
Looped like commensurable pearls, we hung  
dangled on contingency's brittle twine.  
And I was sickened by the change.

The Designer:

I remember  
with the rare virtue of total clarity:  
a woman at a bar playing solitaire  
drinking clear tall drinks from a crystal glass,  
her mushroom cashmere plush and oversized  
upon boat-necked chiffon, its cuffs hanging  
ultramarine by her wrists, like spouts  
that carved the body far beyond itself  
from bone to basalt, from flesh to pure clean form.  
Like a pivot, she spun that world around her.  
A fixed point, a peg from which the universe could hang.  
Some singularity gathering up the shards to sing  
that there is always so much more to come  
than labyrinthine oblivions  
feeding on evening.

The Writer:

Objects have a power of possession and hypnosis  
to catch pockets of time like fruit flies  
with fishnet gauze and nets of Burano-silk  
with jeans and jackets even, mere hem and stitch  
masking scar and sweat-pore  
until we turn motionlessly eternal.

The Designer:

For at least there were,  
at least there have been  
beautiful things.

The Writer:

Between the heartbreak and the torment,  
the flash and the claw mark,  
the first and last.





The Designer:

Do you remember where we met?

The Writer:

No. It has happened so many times now  
I can't remember which was the first  
like peering down a kaleidoscope of wings and eyes.

This is it  
it's happening  
help me  
can you help me  
can you help me please  
help me  
help me  
I don't know you

The Designer:

Here! Look!  
It's so simple.  
Do you remember this?  
Do you remember sitting here, so long ago?  
And this?  
We stored it in a volume of natural history.  
We'd been at a wedding.  
They took our picture.  
My dear friend, you must remember...

The Writer:

We'd puzzled over the book's treasure;  
somewhere there we stored the picture.  
The spraying drink like a peacock's flair,  
your eyes certain and questioning.  
Terrible irony, the shutter  
fell, corks popping and you asking -

"Why learn or know the names of dead things?  
Tattered pasts call to every present.  
Secrets between teeth in the death's head.  
Secrets the others forgot or ignored."

All we have on moths we have from books.  
Matte paper and pencil lines looped on  
pastel lime, brown, yellow. To show  
loam of lost thoraxes, fantastic  
Latin, wingspans spatchcocked to the page.



From caterpillar to Poplar Hawkmoth  
horns unpeel on scalloped wings, pink-tinged  
dust-brown, the terrifying cloth down  
stretched like sails across the bone's dullness.

Its eyes flair in flight and passion;  
illusions pushing through the green, as good as  
any game. The moth's eyes wink behind willow bud.

Goat-willow's catkin filled the baby's belly  
till it changed, wonderfully, to casting spells of eyes.

Your eyes fix the lens like a pin  
pushed wings to card, carved Latin names  
warding away time like a ghou, like a vampire.

The Designer:

Still bodies saved from death's change.  
Change is the mark of the death's head.

The Writer:

Your hair caught in Cava like foam  
casting rainbows above ships' prows.  
That death's head grin, motionless, says how

The Designer:

"The past teaches us only to  
repeat it indefinitely."

The Writer:

Through that lens you looked and saw and changed:  
a caterpillar in a clear, glass pane  
and from memory's mosaics pieced together  
all I have on - ah! - ah!

The Model:

Bronze greaves, buckled beneath a wheel.  
Helmets wet with sun holding splinters of skull.  
Purple plumes.  
A bank of rushes.

A wrap of plaid, blown lonely across the moors.  
Its brooch hacked clean to land upturned in the bog.  
A child's finger tracks sun-orange tartan  
across the river, the blackness of the copse  
vanishes.  
Deer start.

High-masted ships, gargoyled at the prow.  
Sealskin caked in salt and human waste.  
The intestines spilling -  
an upturned punnet.

The insignia of Jupiter, a four crested star.  
Impossible shimmering of nanotechnology.  
Laser burns.  
The smell of singed hair.  
Gasps and screaming lost within the vacuum.

The itch of fallout, hot within the basement.  
Planetary survival suit ripped and ragged.  
Oxygen.  
A cracked vizor.  
The red dust swallows half a trade-marked glove.



An interview with Isabella Davey for TWIN Magazine, 30 July, 2018

#### HOW DID WEAR COME ABOUT?

AW: We met through a mutual friend and were instantly fascinated with one another's work. At the time I was in the process of sketching ideas for an opera about time travel that could exploit art music's ability to manipulate the listener's experience of temporality. In one of many late night discussions with Gemma it struck us both how interesting it might be to set it in the world of fashion. Fashion – it seems to me, at least – is, like music, specifically concerned with time. On one hand, it is fleeting and ephemeral, a constant flow of changing trends with their momentary beauty made even more vivid by its impending obsolescence. On the other, clothes – great clothes, that is – have this magical power to almost freeze their wearers in time and protect them from the rot and decay of disintegrating life as though together they had become an artwork. I think, tentatively, it is in the contradiction and interplay between these opposing aspects that fashion derives a meaningful beauty. The desire to explore some of these ideas, and their philosophical implications in music, poetry and dance, was where WEAR began.

#### WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO WANTING TO WORK WITH OPERA

GAW: I think opera has similar challenges to fashion in that people are often scared by it and therefore actually miss out on the beauty of it. On a very practical level, I think that increasingly exhibitions are becoming massive blockbusters; the curator has been overtaken by fashion brands using in-house teams to convey their own very controlled commercial message and this means that rather than allowing an external thinker into the process to extract a narrative they are becoming very set promotional events. There is very little room to experiment, especially with budgets, so when I met Alastair I thought this was a really exciting aspect to explore and develop. It's also never actually been done before!

#### HOW DO FASHION AND PERFORMANCE INTERACT AND RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER

GAW: Well they are intrinsic. From our first understanding of performance, it's embedded in the visual - Bowie is a prime example, and the very best, groundbreaking artists play with this. Also, for me it's about emotion - something incredibly difficult to convey in an exhibition but immediately unlocked in music, performance or fashion. Why I'm particularly excited about WEAR is that we haven't simply dressed the models: fashion inspired the construction of the music so it's an opera that's been woven, like a fabric.

#### WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE AUDIENCE WILL TAKE FROM WEAR?

AW: WEAR isn't so much a story about time machines as it is about a world where they make true stories no longer possible. Multiple timelines are a contradiction in terms – they couldn't exist side by side as the current Star Trek reboot and continuation have tried to imply. Rather, they would be experienced as a constant erasure and reworking of history. I hope it works as a metaphor for the modern world, where the past seems so distant from our amnesiac, ever-modernising present, and the fact that we can now use the contemporary excess of information to justify almost anything. I suppose I hope that people take that the only way forward from such a moment is not through the dull, methodical reconstruction of the past, but the possibility of something totally new, something utterly unexpected – that no one had thought possible before – that didn't need to happen – that was, until now, in this shifting, tumbling present, impossible to imagine. It's only in this that we can re-light radical politics and art towards their revolutionary efficacy.

#### WHAT CAN OPERA LEARN FROM FASHION AND FASHION LEARN FROM OPERA

GAW: Fashion is adept at remaining relevant in how it pushes the boundaries of a vast array of different contexts. The most provocative designers build a mix of philosophy, performance and fine art into their garments and collections but in such a way that they are still commercial pieces that can be worn on the body.

AW; Opera, by contrast, is hamstrung by an industry built on museum-piece regurgitation of the past at the expense of new work. It survives by breaking out of the opera house and fighting its way back to the cut and thrust of the real world, full of all its confusing exhilaration and cheap, strange ugliness. The challenge is not to ignore these factors, but rather to reconcile them somehow with the beauty of art and, in this, the possibility of a better future.



### **Alastair White**

Alastair White is a Scottish composer who has created multidisciplinary work for major festivals and institutions around the country. Currently pursuing a PhD that combines composition with Marxism and quantum mechanics at Goldsmiths, University of London, he speaks internationally on his research interests in the relationship between music, politics and science. [www.alastairwhite.org](http://www.alastairwhite.org)

### **Gemma A. Williams**

Gemma A. Williams is an Irish curator and writer specialising in designers from emerging markets. Her interests lie in the creation of new narrative possibilities in communicating fashion. She is the former editorial associate global markets at the Business of Fashion and author of *Fashion China*, Thames & Hudson. @gemmacurates

### **Derek Lawlor**

An alumnus of Central Saint Martin's BA and MA courses, Derek Lawlor is a knitwear designer with an intuitive understanding of textiles. Alongside his collections, Lawlor produces exclusive pieces for editorial, music videos, printed publications and exhibitions. He tutors on CSM's Textile Design course and has lectured globally.

### **Alana Everett**

Alana Everett is a contemporary artist trained in ballet and choreography with a Bachelor's Degree in Contemporary Dance. She has worked in live contemporary performance, site-specific work, video clips, tv commercials, the circus, music theatre, as well as choreographing and dancing for fashion and cabaret.

### **Ben Smith**

Ben Smith is a London-based composer and performer specialising in contemporary music. He is interested in – amongst other things – phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and compositional encounters with silence and repetition. Ben recently graduated from Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he studied with Rolf Hind and Laurence Crane. [www.bensmithmusic.co.uk](http://www.bensmithmusic.co.uk)

### **Kelly Poukens**

Kelly Poukens regularly performs on a variety of stages in Belgium and abroad. She has given lied recitals in famed venues such as the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts (Brussels) and the Muziekgebouw Frits Philips (Eindhoven, the Netherlands). From 2017–2018, she will be performing as a soloist with Holland Opera.

### **Sarah Parkin**

Soprano Sarah Parkin (MMus -RNCM; BMus - UofT.) Recent and upcoming roles: *Eumene* (*Xerse*); *Poppea* (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*); *Miss Wordsworth* (*Albert Herring*); *Sidonie* (*Armide*); *Minerva* (*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*). Sarah most recently appeared in *A Certain Sense of Order* (tick tock opera), which will tour to Luxembourg in 2019.

### **Betty Makharinsky**

Betty is a British-Russian soprano who has studied at the Guildhall School, previously receiving a First Class Music BA from the University of Oxford. Recent opera credits include *Amor Orfeo ed Euridice* (*New Sussex Opera*), cover *Zerlina* *Don Giovanni* (*HeadFirst Productions*), and *Belinda Dido and Aeneas* (*St Martin-in-the-Fields, Woodhouse Opera*).

### **Max Gershon**

Currently training at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in Contemporary Dance. He recently choreographed for the Tate exchange programme at the Tate Modern and Bonnie Bird Theatre. Max uses his knowledge of form, from his training at The Old Vic Theatre and work in fine art, to create a new, individual style.

