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## Further details announced for four groundbreaking opera and music theatre UK premieres at the Barbican this autumn

This autumn, the Barbican is delighted to host four groundbreaking new music theatre and opera projects receiving their UK premieres this coming autumn/winter season 2024-25.

- **Rolf Hind: *Sky in a Small Cage* ([Sun 8 Sep 2024, 7.30pm](#))**
- **National Changgeuk Company of Korea: *Lear* ([Thu 3 – Sun 6 Oct 2024](#))**
- **The Golden Stool, or the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa ([Mon 14 Oct 2024, 7.30pm](#))**
- **Huang Ruo's *M. Butterfly* ([Fri 25 Oct 2024, 7.30pm](#))**

Opera and music theatre have long histories, conventions and rules. As such, these art forms are rich with potential for subversion. Inversions, parody, irony, and deconstruction are deployed to challenge audiences' expectations, leaving them with a changed view of the world. Various combining Sufi, Ghanaian, Chinese, Indian, Korean and Western classical traditions, each of these projects confront hierarchical structures, examine unequal distributions of power, and ask the question: where can the interaction between multiple traditions create something new?

Rolf Hind and Mahogany Opera's ***Sky in a Small Cage*** employs a multidisciplinary approach to tell the story of the legendary 13th century Sufi poet Rumi. Hind's score brings together Arabic and Turkish influences to imagine the lost sound world of the poet. ***The Golden Stool, or the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa*** explores the life of an Ashanti woman who stood up against colonial injustice in Ghana. In re-contextualising pieces of Western music, it brings a familiar music history into an examination of colonial struggle.

Huang Ro's ***M. Butterfly***, based on the Broadway smash-hit play, combines the themes of Puccini's opera with a true story of a French diplomat in China to explore Asian representation in opera, and the relationships between East and West. Meanwhile in the Barbican Theatre, ***Lear***, a major new production by the National Changgeuk Company of Korea, is a visionary restaging of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies in the form of Changgeuk, a genre of traditional Korean opera. The culturally significant and artistically rich form blends music, dance, and drama to create immersive storytelling experiences rooted in Korean tradition and heritage.

For detailed information about each of these projects, including cast information, please see below.

**UK Premiere - Rolf Hind: *Sky in a Small Cage: The extraordinary life of Rumi***  
**Sunday 8 September 2024, 7.30pm**  
**Barbican Hall**  
**Tickets from £15 plus booking fee**

Internationally renowned opera company Mahogany Opera presents the **UK premiere** of ***Sky in a Small Cage***, a new opera with music by composer and pianist **Rolf Hind**, words by award-winning poet **Dante Micheaux** and direction by Mahogany Opera's founder, **Frederic Wake-Walker**.

***Sky in a Small Cage*** is presented as a staged oratorio that reflects on the extraordinary life and works of the 13th-century Sufi poet, Rumi. The piece centers on Rumi's relationship with his master and beloved muse Shams, and Shams' subsequent murder at the suspected hands of Rumi's brothers. New words by Micheaux are interspersed with text from Rumi's own poetry to create a panoptic set of scenes that capture the ecstasy and despair of Rumi's life.

Wake-Walker's production will bring the players, singers and audience into dynamic relationship across the space of the Barbican Hall, drawing out themes of ambiguity, spiritual love and self-becoming.

Hind's brand-new score draws on his life-long fascination with musical instruments and tonalities from central Europe, Java and India as well as influences from Arabic and Turkish music.

*Sky in a Small Cage* is an exploration into our contemporary experience of Rumi's work and an expression of the life-affirming and universalist message of Sufi thought; connecting movement, music and poetry in a defiant call to awaken.

The UK premiere performance of *Sky in a Small Cage* at the Barbican will star **Elaine Mitchener** as the Narrator, **Loré Lixenberg** (Shaman of the Birds and Kerra, Rumi's wife), countertenor **James Hall** and baritone/dancer **Yannis François**, with six ensemble singers and onstage musicians from **Riot Ensemble** conducted by **Aaron Holloway-Nahum**.

Produced by the Barbican  
[Find out more](#)

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**UK Premiere - National Changgeuk Company of Korea: *Lear***  
**Thu 3 – Sun 6 Oct 2024**  
**Barbican Theatre**  
**Press performance: Thu 3 Oct, 7pm**

**National Changgeuk Company of Korea** make their Barbican debut with the **UK premiere** of ***Lear***, a visionary restaging of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies into a spellbinding

traditional Korean opera. This major new production, critically acclaimed at its premiere in Korea's National Theater in 2022, retells a familiar story in the form of Changgeuk. The culturally significant and artistically rich theatrical form in Korea blends music, dance, and drama to create immersive storytelling experiences rooted in Korean tradition and heritage combined with creative contemporary influences. *Lear* will also open the 2024 K-Music Festival.

*Lear* is helmed by some of the country's leading creatives, performers and musicians including one of the greatest playwrights of Korea, **Pai Sam-shik** (*Trojan Women*), direction and choreography by **Jung Young-doo**, Pansori (traditional Korean folk opera) scores composed by **Han Seung-seok**, with additional music written by K-Pop producer **Jung Jae-il** (*Parasite*, *Squid Game*). The stunning set design by **Lee Tae-sup** brings a quiet but vibrant world of water on stage, drawing us to the deep, bottomless abyss of the human mind.

National Changgeuk Company of Korea is one of the resident companies of the National Theater of Korea and it has been presenting traditional Korean opera for the past six decades. Since 2012, the company has explored wider possibilities within the genre, adopting contemporary themes, collaborating with international artists and reaching a global audience for the first time. The company made their UK premiere with their acclaimed restaging of Euripides' *Trojan Women* (LIFT 2018; Edinburgh International Festival 2023). *Lear* is part of the UK-wide K-Music Festival 2024, showcasing contemporary Korean music based on traditions.

The National Changgeuk Company of Korea's presentation of *Lear* is supported by the Korean Cultural Centre UK as part of the K-Music Festival 2024

Presented by the Barbican

[Find out more](#)

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**UK Premiere - *The Golden Stool, or the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa***

**Monday 14 Oct 2024, 7:30pm**

**Barbican Hall**

**Tickets from £15 plus booking fee**

The **UK Premiere** of Belgian/Ghanaian composer and director **Gorges Ocloo's** acclaimed Ghanaian '*Afropera*' project, ***The Golden Stool, or the story of Nana Yaa Asantewaa***, pays homage to the heroic woman who confronted colonial injustice in Ghana.

Around 1900, Nana Yaa Asantewaa – then an old woman – led the resistance against the British empire's demand for the Golden Stool – the divine throne of kings of the Ashanti people. British troops had been murdering the Ashanti people for decades to access their timber, gold and cocoa and the British colonialists' attempt to take the Stool was a step too far and Nana Yaa Asantewaa organised a brigade of women to resist their efforts.

To celebrate Asantewaa's legacy through music, Ocloo deconstructs and reconstructs pieces from the all-white canon of Western classical music. Works by Handel, Bizet, Shostakovich, Verdi, Vivaldi, Beethoven, and Orff are reimagined through a Ghanaian lens with additional voices, drums and percussion, and performed by a cast of women designed to echo the heroic brigade.

*The Golden Stool's* cast of all-female performers includes **Nobulumko Mngxekeza-Nziramanga** (soprano), **Nonkululeko Nkwinti** (mezzo-soprano), **Doris Bokongo Nkumu**, **Nathalie Bokongo Nkumu**, **Abena Biney Gloria**, **Titilayo Oliha**, **Saar-Niragire De Groof**, **Briana Stuart**, **Maimouna Badjie** and **Somalia Williamson**, in a production by **LOD muziektheater & Toneelhuis**, who will sing, act and dance the story of Asantewaa's struggle in the face of colonial oppression.

*'The fearlessness with which Ocloo takes on different disciplines and roles is immensely refreshing. A show of his never leaves you untouched'* (Jury of the Flemish Cultuurprijs Ultima)

*'Mixing Western opera traditions with African percussion and beats? For that you need a delightfully unorthodox composer like Gorges Ocloo. Musically he treads unseen paths'* (De Standaard).

Produced by the Barbican

[Find out more](#)

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**UK Premiere - Huang Ruo's *M. Butterfly***

**Friday 25 Oct 2024, 7:30pm**

**Barbican Hall**

**Tickets from £15 plus booking fee**

The Barbican and Associate Orchestra the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** co-present a semi-staged version of **Huang Ruo's** opera of **David Henry Hwang's** smash-hit play ***M. Butterfly***.

Based on a true story of a French diplomat in China, the roles of Madame Butterfly and Pinkerton (the Eastern and Western protagonists in Puccini's original opera) are here inverted. In Ruo's version, René Gallimard, a diplomat at the French embassy in Beijing, falls in love with a beautiful Chinese opera singer named Song Liling. Song holds two shocking secrets, both of which eventually bring Gallimard to professional and personal ruin.

The story's many parallels with Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* are echoed in the new work, which also pays tribute to the history of opera, while simultaneously subverting what Ruo describes as the "*kind of imbalance between East and West, the smaller picture [of] the interplay of male and female*" as well as the treatment of Asian characters found in Puccini's original work.

Director **James Robinson**'s gripping production captures both the driving pulse and the lyricism of Puccini's original music and reveals the blurred lines between fantasy and reality at the heart of this true story of ambiguity, illusion, fluidity and metaphor.

**Carolyn Kuan** will conduct the BBC Symphony Orchestra and a cast of **Kangmin Justin Kim** (Song Liling), **Mark Stone** (René Gallimard), **Fleur Barron** (Comrade Chin/Shu Fung), **Kevin Burdette Manuel** (Toulon/Judge) and the **BBC Singers**.

*"I want people to understand the story, but also to ask questions. That, to me, is the best opera can do: Not to provide answers, but to provoke questions. And to leave the audience asking questions about their own background, their own journey."* **Huang Ruo, composer**

*"Ultimately, the opera transcends its source material, finding universal and operatic themes in a very specific story that still grapples with the issues of gender and racial stereotyping."* **Santa Fe Reporter, 2022.**

Co-produced by the Barbican and BBC Symphony Orchestra  
[Find out more](#)

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

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All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at [www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room](http://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room)  
About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Theatre Productions](#).

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