



THE PARADIS FILES

SUPPORT A NEW OPERA
LIKE NO OTHER

GRAEae40

CELEBRATING FOUR DECADES

Commissioned by The Stables as part of its 50th anniversary programme
for IF: Milton Keynes International Festival

The Paradis Files: A New Opera

Graeae is producing a new opera based on the remarkable, but little-known, story of Austrian composer, **Maria Theresia von Paradis**. As a blind composer and musician, she was well-known within Viennese society and highly valued by the leading musicians of her day, such as Mozart, Salieri and Haydn. Von Paradis invented new ways of reading music and travelled widely throughout Europe with her mother, performing at all the major courts, including that of King George III.

This new opera will capture the emotional relationships of her dramatic life, reveal the impact of her talent on those around her and explore how she owned her destiny.



Maria Theresia von Paradis
1759 - 1824



The Paradis Files in rehearsal

Through the creation of this striking new piece of work, Graeae will celebrate disabled artists and open up opera to new audiences. Directed by Jenny Sealey MBE, co-director of the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony, and with leading-composer Errollyn Wallen CBE, this beautiful production with its striking evocation of 18th Century musical life, is designed to be toured worldwide. The project includes: the opera production, its digital presentation and accompanying community outreach.



The Theresia von Paradis Story

The opera follows Theresia von Paradis' life and career as a successful composer and musician, her European tour, and how she founded one of the leading schools for blind musicians (1785) and a music school for girls. She was connected to many of the leading musicians of the day and had personal and professional relationships with both Mozart and Salieri.

The narrative arc will also show, from her own point of view, how von Paradis was exposed to an extraordinary variety of treatments to 'cure' her blindness. Treated by Dr. Franz Mesmer, who believed that magnetism could heal illness, most stories about her revolve around this, rather than her musical success. She was also used as a pawn by her family to secure financial gain and the vulnerability of her position was exploited by others.

This new opera will share the life of an astonishing artist who was both manipulated and deified, but who succeeded in controlling her own destiny, achieving fame and a career in music; fighting for her talent to be acknowledged and judged on its own terms.



A development workshop of The Paradis Files

Why is this new opera important and worth supporting?

Opera

An opera like no other. This piece will challenge perceived norms to create a beautiful, textural and passionate response to a moment in history. Accessible elements (see following page) will form part of the story-telling, opening up the experience to a wide and diverse audience – some experiencing opera for the first time.

Top creative team

Building on its reputation for the creation of world-class theatre, Graeae has assembled an outstanding artistic team, including: Director Jenny Sealey MBE, who co-directed the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony; leading composer Errollyn Wallen CBE who wrote a new arrangement of Jerusalem for the Last Night of the Proms 2020; and mezzo soprano, Bethan Langford.

A unique production

This story of a successful disabled artist will be presented in an accessible way by an artistic team with lived experience of disability. The team's familiarity with being sidelined in the arts – having experienced disablism, sexism and racism in the commissioning and rehearsal process – will bring authentic storytelling to this project and much needed diversity to the world of opera.

Deaf and disabled artists at its core

Graeae will tell the story of this incredible disabled artist with authenticity, uncovering a little-known piece of history with the libretto co-written by two disabled women, Nicola Werenowska and Selina Mills.

‘Aesthetics of access’

Graeae will bring its celebrated ‘aesthetics of access’ to the opera world, integrating creativity to all elements of the show with British Sign Language (BSL) and audio description integrated as part of the script and performance.

Finds new audiences

This project will enable Graeae to find new audiences for its work and find new communities for opera through its outreach activity.



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Challenges myths of the musical canon

By telling this story in an accessible way and raising awareness about a talented disabled artist - so famous in her own time though now largely forgotten - Graeae will challenge historical misconceptions and increase people's understanding of the lived experience of artists like von Paradis.

A significant legacy

The narrative itself, the comparisons for Deaf and disabled artists then and now, twinned with the artistic team and its accessible process, is inspiring and will be leading the way for similar productions in the future. Graeae will work with partners from the opera industry who want to become more inclusive in their practice, onstage, backstage and front-of-house.



Errollyn Wallen (composer) in rehearsals

The production and its team

The Paradis Files is an indoor chamber opera which will feature an ensemble of six singers and five musicians.

The formidable artistic team includes: internationally renowned composer **Errollyn Wallen CBE**, who has written numerous acclaimed opera pieces; Graeae Artistic Director **Jenny Sealey MBE** as Director; Musical Director **Andrea Brown** who has directed and devised award-winning festivals and concert seasons globally; the award-winning Playwright, **Nicola Werenowska** as Librettist; award-winning historian and writer, **Selina Mills** (who originally conceived the idea for this opera) as Co-Librettist; Founder and Artistic Director of Tête à Tête, **Bill Banks Jones** as Dramaturg; and renowned casting director, **Sarah Playfair**. Casting is in progress, with British Mezzo Soprano **Bethan Langford** confirmed in the title role.

The creative team are in the process of undertaking work on the script, the score and the design concept. Composer Errollyn Wallen CBE is set to present a contemporary score which also echoes the time of the piece. Graeae will be working with Deaf and disabled artists to explore the music, story and soundscape. The performative elements of the opera are being devised through a number of workshops with the singers. This also includes explorations of how to creatively integrate BSL into the opera aesthetic. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the delivery of the opera, but it is currently planned for the World Premiere to take place in Spring 2022, before touring internationally and nationally.

Digital reach

The creation of a high-quality digital imagining of the opera lies at the heart of the project, aimed at giving audiences worldwide the ability to enjoy and engage with the piece. It will offer a rich experience through the incorporation of various elements, such as interviews with the artists and behind-the-scenes footage. Watch a documentary about the opera's creation to date at www.graeae.org/our-work/the-paradis-files

Outreach and educational plans

The project will draw on Graeae's considerable collective experience to build a robust and accessible engagement programme around this ground-breaking opera. Given the ever-changing Covid-19 situation, plans are not confirmed yet. Graeae also wants to reach traditional opera audiences and give those who might not be able to attend a performance in-person, the chance to engage with the opera and its creation.



A development workshop of The Paradis Files

Support us

Graeae has already secured key funding from a number of trusts (The Cockayne Foundation, The Garfield Weston Charitable Trust) and invested its own funds. The Stables has contributed seed funding to support the commission. To present the project in full, however, Graeae needs to secure an additional £50,000 and so is seeking a number of supporters to make donations. Any gift, large or small, would make all the difference. Funds donated will go directly to ensure the high quality of the production, and to deliver the digital and outreach activities. Supporting this new opera will ensure that it has a successful world premiere before it tours internationally.

As a thank you, Graeae will offer a number of benefits, including: meeting the artistic team with the chance to find out more about the production; opportunity to join rehearsals; invitation to the World Premiere with drinks reception; and your kind support acknowledged on printed and online material, such as programmes. Events will be virtual or in-person and will be delivered under the guidance of Covid-19 regulations.

To find out more, contact richard@graeae.org

About Graeae

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2021, Graeae is an acclaimed and award-winning theatre company, existing to cultivate and champion the best in Deaf and disabled talent on UK and international stages. Recent productions and co-productions have included *One Under*, the hit Ian Dury musical *Reasons to be Cheerful*, *The House of Bernarda Alba* starring Kathryn Hunter, *Blood Wedding*, *The Threepenny Opera* and outdoor epics *The Iron Man* and *This Is Not For You*. In addition to productions, Graeae also run an extensive programme of training and learning throughout the year, working with early and mid-career Deaf and disabled artists across the UK to cultivate and develop their careers. Since 1997, Graeae has been run by Jenny Sealey MBE, who also co-directed the London 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony.



A development workshop of *The Paradis Files*

How your donation helps

£10 two vocal scores for our singers

£50 copies of the score for all the creative team

£100 one Audio Description consultation to help make the opera accessible to blind and visually impaired audiences

£250 a rehearsal with one of our musicians

£500 one outreach session or the Front of House Model Box which enables blind or visually impaired people to explore the set before each performance

£1,000 our production photographs

£1,500 the British Sign Language translation costs to help make the opera accessible to Deaf audiences

£3,000 one training opportunity for an emerging professional artist who is disabled in the post of Assistant Director, Assistant Designer or Assistant Conductor

£3,500 the creative captioning for our performances to help make the opera accessible to Deaf and neurodiverse audience members

£5,000 a répétiteur (tutor) for our opera singers or support a performer for the whole tour

£10,000 a film-making team to create our digital screening or support the creation of a documentary about the production making process

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