

The Alma Fetish



WIDE OPEN OPERA

THE ALMA FETISH

OPERA IN TWO ACTS BY

Raymond Deane (Music)

Gavin Kostick (Text)

Concept proposed by Pauline Bewick

World premiere

Concert performance sung in English with English surtitles

RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra
Chorus of Wide Open Opera

17 September 2013
National Concert Hall, Dublin

This performance will be recorded
for future broadcast on RTÉ lyric fm

Images by Pauline Bewick photographed by Michael Herrmann appear throughout the programme

WELCOME



I'M DELIGHTED TO WELCOME you to the world premiere performance of *The Alma Fetish* by Raymond Deane (music) and Gavin Kostick (text). It is an exciting moment to present a first performance of an opera of this scale and ambition with a distinguished Irish and international cast, the wonderful RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and a hand-picked professional chorus of top Irish singers.

This opera has been in gestation for many years. I was introduced to the process in 2008, but it was a concept that had occupied artist Pauline Bewick for many years previously. She researched the true story of Oskar Kokoschka's infatuation with Alma Mahler, and his replacement of her as his partner with a specially commissioned life-size doll. Pauline saw this as an ideal concept for an opera, and conceived stage designs modelled on six fans that Kokoschka hand-painted for Alma. A conversation with Ethna Tinney, then opera producer at RTÉ lyric fm, led to a commission for Raymond Deane and Gavin Kostick to write one scene of the opera. Scene 3 was completed in 2008, and in 2009 I recorded it for broadcast on RTÉ lyric fm with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

Bursary and Project funding from the Arts Council allowed Raymond and Gavin to complete the opera in the intervening years and tonight's performance is our first opportunity to present it to a live audience.

In recent years, it has been a rarity to encounter a new Irish opera, and all the more rare to hear a performance on tonight's scale. I'm very grateful to those who made this possible – our partners the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, the National Concert Hall, RTÉ lyric fm, the Contemporary Music Centre and our funders The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon. It is my intention that this will be the first of many new operas to be presented by Wide Open Opera.



Our inaugural performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre last autumn took the opera world by storm and garnered universal acclaim. I'm delighted that this will be followed by *The Alma Fetish* – attentive listeners and Wide Open Opera followers will be thrilled by the Wagnerian reference in Scene 1 of tonight's opera! We follow this with a co-production with NI Opera of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Gerald Barry in October/November in Derry, Belfast, Cork and Dublin. This is the first Irish production of this hilarious opera, which is destined to be a classic. In May 2014, again in the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, we present the Irish premiere of John Adams' opera *Nixon in China*, a seminal contemporary opera which has been seen the world over. Next summer we will also be out on the streets with a Dublin City Council commission of five operas, each of five minutes duration, by Brian Irvine (music) and John McIlkuff (text).

Our mission is to present new experiences for opera-goers. We believe in the vitality of Irish composers and writers. We also plan to bring to audiences major works of the international opera repertory that are not familiar in Ireland. I hope you can support us in this journey. Enjoy tonight's performance – and please: give us some feedback. The purpose of this performance is to show the work to a live audience, and we absolutely need to know what you think.

You can reach us at:
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Fergus Sheil

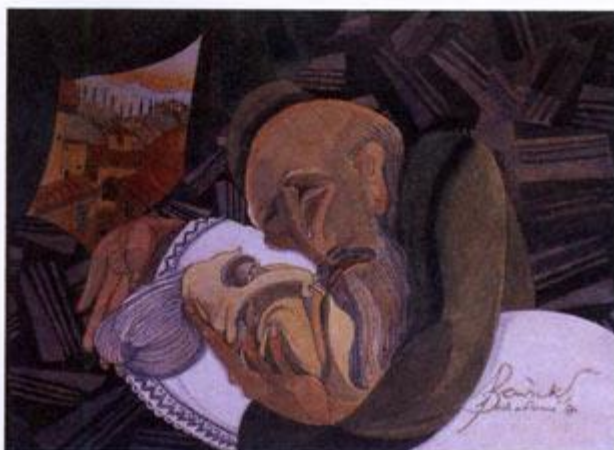
Fergus Sheil
Artistic Director
Wide Open Opera



PAULINE BEWICK ON THE ALMA FETISH



OSKAR KOKOSCHKA WROTE NUMEROUS detailed letters instructing a seamstress on how she should make him a perfect life-size doll of the woman who rejected him. 'Use only the softest of silks for the inner thigh', he stipulated. 'I must never be aware of seams. Will I be able to dress her?' The doll was of Alma Mahler, composer and Viennese beauty. She had totally rejected Kokoschka after their passionate love affair. When the doll was finally finished, Kokoschka would take it to the opera and to parties. Everyone in Vienna knew of Kokoschka's doll.



When exhibiting in London in the late 1980s, I read these amazing letters, which inspired me with an idea for an opera. I not only wrote an opera synopsis, calling it *Obsession*, but also painted the set ideas. These I took to Jeremy Isaacs and Anthony Russell-Roberts of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden. They were excited by the ideas I presented to them, and Anthony Russell-Roberts wrote that 'it would be wonderful to work with you when you return from your South Seas island'. When I did return in 1991, having crab-hunted and swum with the locals for food and so on, opera seemed unnatural and histrionic. I didn't follow up the idea. Not until one day in 2006 when I heard Ethna Tinney speaking of Alma Mahler on RTÉ lyric fm. I contacted her and she got Raymond Deane to compose a part of the story called 'The Arrival of the Doll'. Fergus Sheil did a wonderful job conducting the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, and we were all interviewed on RTÉ lyric fm. Then nothing more happened until now. Raymond Deane and Gavin Kostick have finished it. They have renamed it, and it has become *The Alma Fetish*. Fergus Sheil re-engaged me to complete the artwork, and I am excited to see how it has developed.

