

PRESS RELEASE

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The Pantiles to star in new 'unexpected' opera

This spring a Kent-based touring theatre company that specialises in bringing opera to new audiences will stage a series of six free lunchtime performances at The Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells over the late May bank holiday weekend.

Unexpected Opera has been specially commissioned by the owners of The Pantiles, Targetfollow, to write and perform original operatic entertainment that incorporates various shops and locations throughout The Pantiles into the story.

The Wedding is a five-scene comic opera performed in English, in which the audience is invited to participate in the wedding ceremony and follow the cast as they perform at different spots around The Pantiles including the Bandstand, the Well and the balconies above the shops.

"We have been looking out for an entertaining, clever and refreshingly original event to stage at The Pantiles, and when we first heard about Unexpected Opera and their ideas for *The Wedding*, we knew it would become a real hit," said Adrian Goldney, head of marketing for Targetfollow.

Speaking about the opera, Director Lynn Binstock said, "*The Wedding* is a very funny piece about a Lottery winner trying to marry her daughter into blue blooded stock. It features household name operatic arias, beautifully sung in English, with new lyrics."

The writer behind *The Wedding* is comedian Tony Harris who drew on his experiences of preparing for his own wedding this year to pen the script and lyrics. He said, "Weddings can be very stressful – I am a 30 mogadon a day man now because of

mine! Our 'wedding' is a joyful romp that deals with new money, old poverty and young love."

Harris has woven some of The Pantiles' shops into the piece and *The Wedding* will be performed with four soloists (Elinor Chapman, soprano; Nicola Smedley, mezzo; Jez James, tenor; and Matthew Quirk, baritone) with the author playing various comedy cameo roles.

Unexpected Opera's mandate is to perform in English to audiences who would not normally attend traditional opera. "Many people have difficulty finding a way in to opera. We give our audiences the chance to revel in simple enjoyment rather than feel they have to learn how to enjoy opera. And they can take part, too. Imagine being new to opera and being unexpectedly thrilled by it; imagine being in the audience and unexpectedly taking part in the show," enthused Binstock.

Its current tour of *The Barber of Savile Row* is in its second year and the show has been delighting audiences at theatres all over the country. In January this year *The Times* rated it one of the top five 'must see' operas.

Binstock added: "We are supported by the Arts Council England in our aim to bring opera to a whole new audience – but regular opera goers have been enjoying our work also. It's been described as fresh and different and I'm pretty happy about that."

The Wedding will be staged in The Pantiles during the late spring Bank Holiday weekend, running twice daily for 50 minutes, once at 12pm and then again at 2pm on Saturday 23rd, Sunday 24th and Monday 25th May.

"We hope people will make the most of this opportunity to enjoy funny and original musical theatre in one of the most beautiful outdoor venues in the south east," concluded Adrian Goldney.

The Wedding will commence at the Bandstand on the Upper Pantiles and guests are requested to arrive ten minutes before each performance begins. The show is free and no tickets are required. In the event of wet weather, *The Wedding* will be performed in the Corn Exchange. For more information visit www.thepantilesonline.co.uk

The Pantiles Traders Association are part sponsors of the Unexpected Opera.

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