OPERA UP CLOSE
La Bohème

Cock Tavern Theatre

2009
La Bohème

Soho Theatre

2010
The Coronation of Poppea

King’s Head Theatre

2011
The Elixir of Love

King’s Head Theatre

2013
Young Wife

King’s Head Theatre

2014
La Traviata

King's Head, Soho and Belgrade Theatres, and touring

2013/14
Ulla’s Odyssey

King’s Place, and touring

2015/16
Carmen

Soho and Belgrade Theatres, and touring

2015/16
Business model in October 2009

- There wasn’t one!
Development of OUC business model

Then (October 2010)

- Company limited by shares
- Funded almost entirely by ticket sales (with very occasional individual giving)
- Staff: two Artistic Directors, two Producers, Theatre Manager, plus unpaid Trainee Producer & Trainee Director interns and volunteer ushers

Now (October 2016)

- Charity with a board of trustees
- Funded by trusts and foundations, ACE project funding, box office revenue (venue guarantees), individual giving
- Staff: AD/Chief Exec, Executive Producer, Producer, Administrator, part-time Programming and Marketing Office, paid Trainee Producer
Then (October 2010)

- Running a 110-seat fringe theatre, programming opera, theatre and visiting companies
- Co-productions: one show (Bohème) with Soho Theatre
- Artistic: two operas (Bohème and The Barber of Seville), cast size 6-8, new English versions, piano accompaniment
- Pay: negotiating an in-house Equity contract which would guarantee everyone was paid at least NMW
- Education / access: £10 tickets, training schemes, ‘accessible’ productions.

Now (October 2016)

- Touring company visiting 150- to 900-seat venues, e.g. North Wall Oxford, Belgrade Coventry
- Co-productions: Soho, Belgrade, Tricycle, Kings Place (lots of different models)
- Artistic: 25 operas, cast size 3–10, new English versions & orchestrations, 4 new operas, 1 opera for children
- Pay: standard Equity contracts used
- Education / access: low and/or flexible ticket prices, paid training schemes, collaboration with venues, workshops, programme of operas for young people
What happened in between?

- Period when we tried to run ‘commercially’
- Period of organic, reactive growth
- Decision to put values first
Our values – ‘why?’ and ‘how?’

We want to show that opera is for everyone, through high quality, innovative productions.

We create:

- New versions of classic operas, including:
  - New English librettos
  - New orchestrations
  - Innovative re-imaginings of characters and settings
- World premiere chamber operas
- A direct and intimate experience of opera, breaking down the barriers to enable the audience to see both the characters and the singers’ performances in detail
We provide:

- Opportunities for composers and librettists to create new work, through new commissions for every production and a bi-annual world premiere of a new opera through the Flourish competition
- Training for producers and directors
- Opportunities for performance and professional development for emerging artists
- Subsidised tickets for our shows for those on low incomes
- Opportunities to get close to our work and creative processes through open rehearsals, workshops, Q&As etc. – de-mystifying opera and theatre
What are the challenges facing OperaUpClose?

- **Artistic**
  - quality (single-casting, retention, consistency)
  - staying fresh
  - losing smaller tour venues as we get bigger, recruiting ‘theatre’ venues

- **Funding and finances**
  - core funding very hard to come by
  - maintaining support of Friends more difficult as a touring company
  - opera (of any scale) is expensive

- **Diversity**
Development of OUC business model

Future (October 2020)?

- Charity with a board of trustees
- Funded by trusts and foundations, ACE as part of National Portfolio, box office revenue (venue guarantees), individual giving
- Staff: AD/Chief Exec, part-time Musical Director, Executive Producer, Producer, Administrator, part-time Programming and Marketing Office, part-time Development Office, paid Trainee Producer, paid Trainee Director
- Touring company touring two scales (small- and mid-scale) of productions for longer runs, ‘joined up’ tours
- Touring to producing theatres, and contemporary music venues
Co-productions and partnerships: including with a professional orchestra and a music college

Artistic: single-cast, range of scales, bi-annual new opera, bi-annual opera for children, racially diverse casts

Pay: standard Equity contracts used as a minimum, paid covers

Education / access: low and/or flexible ticket prices, collaboration with venues with repeat visits and long-term partnerships, workshops for a range of ages developed with partner Big Wheel, programme of operas for young people
Diversifying audiences

- Resist lazy stereotyping
- Language
- Venues
- Subsidy
OPERA UP CLOSE

Robin Norton-Hale, Artistic Director & Chief Exec