

Press release – for immediate use:

## **Russian ballerinas in legendary opera**

Young ballerinas from Russia will be among the stars of a magical performance of Purcell's opera and ballet masterpiece *Dido and Aeneas* in Twickenham, south west London, on Mothers' Day - Sunday, March 6 - as part of Richmond-upon-Thames's annual music and drama festival.

Sensational soprano Emily Kirby-Ashmore sings *Dido* alongside baritone Ian Helm's assured *Aeneas*. They are joined by a quartet from the Royal Academy of Music in London and accompanied by the Bridge String Quartet, conducted by Andy Langley. The performance is directed by Simon Iorio from Glyndebourne Festival and the Royal Opera House.

The dancers, aged from 7 to 15, from Ekaterina Vladimirova's Ballet Academy in Moscow, will join a chorus of witches formed of children from the local Twickenham Preparatory School in a staging of the classic opera.

The opera will be staged "in the round", with the audience seated around the performers to get a close-up of the dancers' intricate footwork. It is being held in the ornate Waldegrave Drawing Room at St Mary's University. The university is sponsoring the event, together with the Helen Astrid Singing Academy, Twickenham Preparatory School, Bang and Olufsen and The King's Head in Teddington, but further sponsors are needed.

The event is being produced by opera singer and singing teacher Helen Astrid, who describes it as "a once-in-a-lifetime artistic experience for the children, which will promote international cooperation as well as the local community".

Helen also hopes it will "provide a golden opportunity for the stars of the future".

She says: "It's exciting to be part of the next Richmond-upon-Thames Music and Drama Festival, bringing something truly international to the borough. The ballerinas from Russia haven't been to the UK before, so giving them the opportunity to collaborate with local school children and professional artists will be inspiring and thrilling."

Helen decided to stage Purcell's Dido and Aeneas partly because she has always been fascinated by the opera, which she first sang herself as a 16-year-old.

"It was the first opera I ever sang in. I was at college at the time and still have the rose which was given to me as a thank you by our then maestro, John Walker," she said.

Helen went on to perform the opera a decade later with Ivor Bolton, and then another decade after that, this time with director Mike Hodges, who also directed major films such as Get Carter starring Michael Caine.

"I'm delighted to be able to share my love and experience with others, hence this once-in-a-lifetime performance," she says.

"There are many elements which make this masterpiece magical. It appeals to all ages and also, it's England's oldest opera, written 327 years ago for a girls' school in Chelsea!"

If you are able to support our event, please get in touch with Helen Astrid.

### **Editors notes:**

**Tickets** - priced at £20 or £12 for concessions + booking fee (under 5s are free) are now available: [www.thehelenastridsingingacademy.com](http://www.thehelenastridsingingacademy.com)

**Photographs attached:** Helen Astrid; Russian ballerinas. Other images are available on request.

**Helen Astrid** is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London. An opera singer, she has performed at some of the major venues in the UK, including the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, English National Opera and Garsington Opera. She has also appeared in the West End musical 'Phantom of the Opera'. She appears on radio and TV as an expert in singing and the voice and has written a book called 'Singing tips at your fingertips', available on Amazon.

Her websites are:

[www.thehelenastridsingingacademy.com](http://www.thehelenastridsingingacademy.com) and  
[www.corporatesingingworkshops.com](http://www.corporatesingingworkshops.com)

Helen can be contacted by email: [info@helenastrid.com](mailto:info@helenastrid.com) or on +44(0)7710 245 904.

Richmond upon Thames Music and Drama Festival information:  
[http://www.richmond.gov.uk/music\\_and\\_drama\\_festival](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/music_and_drama_festival)

More information from Angela Harrison, Media Consultant:

[angela@angelaharrisonmedia.co.uk](mailto:angela@angelaharrisonmedia.co.uk)



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London



Twickenham  
Preparatory  
School

Nurturing, Inspiring, Achieving Success