



ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE

THE ROYAL OPERA

Music Director

SIR ANTONIO PAPPANO *cvo*

Director of Opera

OLIVER MEARS

GIANT

Commissioned by **BRITTEN PEARS ARTS** for the
ALDEBURGH FESTIVAL 2023

Music **SARAH ANGLISS**

Libretto **ROSS SUTHERLAND**

Conductor **BEN SMITH**

Director **SARAH FAHIE**

Set Designer **HYEMI SHIN**

Costume Designer **NICKY GILLIBRAND**

Lighting Designer **ADAM SILVERMAN**

Sound Designer **SARAH ANGLISS**

APPROXIMATE TIMINGS

This performance will last approximately 1 hour and 25 minutes with no interval.

LANGUAGE

Sung in English with English surtitles

GUIDANCE

Suitable for ages 16+

This performance contains strong language, depictions of infant mortality, autopsy and infant autopsy and blood. The production uses haze towards the end of the show.

CAST

Charles Byrne **KARIM SULAYMAN** and **MICHAEL GIBSON***

John Hunter **JONATHAN GUNTHORPE**

Rooker **GALINA AVERINA**

Madame DuVal/Curator **ANNA CAVALIERO**

Sister Mary/Curator **MELANIE PAPPENHEIM**

Howison **STEVEN BEARD**

*For this performance the role of Charles Byrne will be sung offstage by **Michael Gibson** and performed by **Karim Sulayman**.

Orchestra

Percussion **STEPHEN HISCOCK**

Viola da Gamba **REIKO ICHISE**

Recorder **OLWEN FOULKES**

Viola **NICOLA HICKS**

Violins **TIAGO SOARES SILVA, AMALIA YOUNG**

PRODUCTION

Audio Description by **ALICE GILMOUR**

BSL Interpretation by **CLARE EDWARDS**

9 MARCH 2024 AT 2.30PM



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

SYNOPSIS

Charles Byrne (1761–1783), ‘The Irish Giant’, was considered a living wonder, a freak, a gentleman, a fine performer, an ‘ill-bred beast’ and a person who held within his bones secrets which surgeon and anatomist John Hunter longed to understand.

In this fictionalised account of two extraordinary lives, John visits a London parlour, where Charles exhibits himself as a piece of living art. John is smitten by Charles’ extraordinary physique so visits him after his show, offering him money, medicine and friendship. Charles sees John as an ally but John is actually after a trade: in return for money and attention, he wants sole access to Charles’ body after death so he can dissect it and put it on public display.

Fearing this fate and the shame of his corpse becoming a public spectacle, Charles refuses John’s request. He begs his manager, Rooker, to seal his corpse in a lead-lined coffin, carry it to Margate and drop it in the sea. But John sends his accomplice Howison to spy on Charles’ deathbed and to intercept his funeral procession. Unbeknown to the mourners, when Charles’ coffin is dropped into the sea at Margate, it contains nothing more than rocks. His corpse has been stolen by Howison and sent to John who boils it to strip the flesh from the bones. John works so furiously on the body, he scorches the bones as he extracts them, losing evidence about Byrne’s medical condition.

John keeps his theft secret at first, then hints about it in cryptic letters to friends: ‘I have a tall man, I cannot wait for you to meet him.’ It’s debatable how much Hunter’s professional vanity or his desire for medical progress prompted him to betray Byrne – the tragedy at the heart of this opera.

– Sarah Angliss and Sarah Fahie

THE ROYAL OPERA

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