

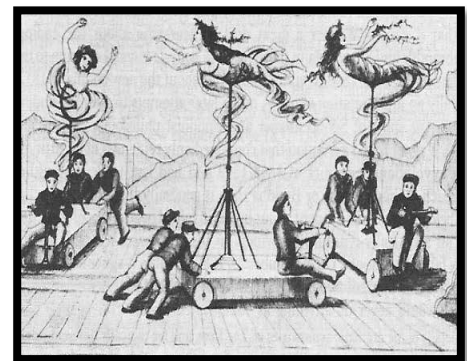


# The Arts Society Oxford

**Backstage at the Opera**  
**September 27<sup>th</sup> 10am to 3pm**  
**Rewley House 1 Wellington Square OX1 2AJ**

**Lecturer: Simon Rees**

Opera is an extravagant and all encompassing art form, bringing together the skills of designers, composers, orchestral musicians, singers, librettists and an army of wardrobe, wig and prop specialists to produce a total experience for the delight of an audience. Simon Rees has been given access to his former company, the Welsh National Opera, to take photographs of every step of the production.



Rhinemaidens swimming

The Welsh National Opera has been coming to Oxford for many years, and has an enthusiastic following.

**Session 1** looks at the conception of an opera from libretto to musical score and its realisation by the directors and designers for the stage. Some set and costume designs have survived for centuries and these and more recent works will be looked at as will the production process.

**Session 2** looks at costume designs and how they are made up into wearable costumes responding to the unusual needs of performers. Props are made up from the original designs or from photographs of museum objects or are bought in junk shops and markets. Sets are built both as flats and as 3-D objects in the opera company workshop and assembled in the rehearsal room.

**Session 3** shows the first piano-vocal rehearsals, first in the rehearsal rooms, then moving to the theatre. We see the theatre's mechanism for changing scenery, and the back-stage environment of dressing-rooms. After a week of stage-and-piano rehearsals, the orchestra enters the pit for stage-and-orchestra rehearsals, followed by the dress rehearsal and the first night. The audience arrives and the production is unveiled.

**Simon Rees** studied at Trinity College, Cambridge. From 1989 to 2012 he was Dramaturg at Welsh National Opera, working with set, costume and props designers and giving lectures on their work in opera production. He is now a freelance writer and lecturer, lecturing on opera, art history and literature and travelling extensively with travel companies. He has published several novels, including the award-winning 'The Devil's Looking-Glass' and poems and opera librettos. Simon and composer Peter Reynolds have written the world's shortest opera 'The Sands of Time'.