



**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PRESENTS COMPANY PREMIERE OF
HANDEL'S *XERXES* STARRING SUSAN GRAHAM AND DAVID DANIELS
OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 19, WAR MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE**

**OLIVIER AWARD-WINNING NICHOLAS HYTNER PRODUCTION
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL WALLING;
CONDUCTED BY PATRICK SUMMERS**

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT (415) 864-3330 OR SFOPERA.COM

SAN FRANCISCO (October 18, 2011)—San Francisco Opera presents the Company premiere of George Frideric Handel's *Xerxes*, opening October 30 with five subsequent performances through November 19. Widely acclaimed as one of the greatest Handel productions of our time, this visually stunning Olivier Award–winning staging of *Xerxes*, created by film and theater director Nicholas Hytner, is directed by Michael Walling. Clever comedy is intertwined with tender poignancy in this tale of unrequited love and intrigue at a royal court. Principal Guest Conductor Patrick Summers leads an outstanding cast featuring mezzo-soprano Susan Graham as Xerxes, countertenor David Daniels as Arsamenes, soprano Lisette Oropesa as Romilda, soprano Heidi Stober as Atalanta, contralto Sonia Prina as Amastris and bass-baritones Wayne Tigges as Ariodates and Michael Sumuel as Elviro.

Mezzo-soprano Susan Graham returns to San Francisco Opera in the title role of Handel's Baroque masterpiece, *Xerxes*. She previously performed this role in the same Hytner production opposite David Daniels with Houston Grand Opera in 2010. A beloved and frequent collaborator with San Francisco Opera, Graham's most recent Company appearance was in the title role of 2008's *Ariodante*, following 2007's acclaimed performances in the title role of Gluck's *Iphigénie en*

Tauride—a role she has also performed at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; the Metropolitan Opera; Paris Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the Salzburg Festival. Among several other San Francisco Opera performances, Graham notably created the role of Sister Helen Prejean in the world premiere of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*.

American countertenor David Daniels (Arsamenes) made his San Francisco Opera debut as Nerone in 1998's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and returned in the title role of *Giulio Cesare* and as Bertarido in *Rodelinda*. Frequently performing both in operas and recitals around the world, Daniels made history as the first countertenor to give a solo recital in the main auditorium of Carnegie Hall. Highlights of recent seasons include the title role in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Metropolitan Opera; Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Lichas in *Hercules* with Lyric Opera of Chicago as well as Roberto in Vivaldi's *Griselda* with the Santa Fe Opera. Daniels has previously appeared as Arsamenes at Houston Grand Opera, Canadian Opera Company and New York City Opera. An active recording artist, David Daniels' debut album in 1998 was *Handel: Opera Arias* conducted by Sir Roger Norrington featuring several selections from *Xerxes*.

American soprano Lisette Oropesa makes her San Francisco Opera debut as Romilda—a new role in her repertoire. A graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Artist Program, her engagements with that company include Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Woglinde in *Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung*, Lisette in *La Rondine*, the Forest Bird in *Siegfried* and Amor in *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Other recent appearances include the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein and her Bavarian State Opera debut as Ismene in *Mitradate, Re di Ponto*.

American soprano Heidi Stober (Atalanta) made her San Francisco Opera debut last season as Sophie in *Werther* and returned as Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*; she returns again this season as Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. A graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, Stober also appeared as Atalanta in that company's 2010 production of *Xerxes*. Future engagements this season include Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* and Micaëla in *Carmen*, among others with Deutsche Oper Berlin; Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel* at the Metropolitan Opera; and Zdenka in *Arabella* with the Santa Fe Opera.

Italian contralto Sonia Prina made her United States debut in 2008 with critically acclaimed performances at San Francisco Opera as Polinesso in *Ariodante*. Prina returns as Amastris, a role she also sang previously with Susan Graham and David Daniels at Houston Grand Opera in 2010. Holding a particular fondness for Handel, Prina has sung the title roles of *Giulio Cesare* in Genoa and Lille, *Orlando* in Ravenna, *Amadigi di Gaula* at the Teatro San Carlo, and *Silla* in Rome.

Bass-baritone Wayne Tigges made his San Francisco Opera debut earlier this season as Sam and Wesley in *Heart of a Soldier*. He returns as Ariodates in this production and again as Zuniga in *Carmen*. Recent engagements include Willy Wonka in the European premiere of Peter Ash's *The Golden Ticket* at the Wexford Festival; Escamillo in *Carmen* and Leporello in *Don Giovanni* at the San Diego Opera; Jochanaan in *Salome* with Arizona Opera; and Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Opera Colorado and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

San Francisco Opera Principal Guest Conductor Patrick Summers most recently led the world premiere of Christopher Theofanidis and Donna Di Novelli's *Heart of a Soldier* at San Francisco Opera. Summers has previously led a vast repertory for the Company, including *Ariodante*; *Samson et Dalila*; *Iphigénie en Tauride*; *Il Trittico*; the world premieres of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1998) and Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* (2000); and the West Coast premiere of Heggie's *Three Decembers* (2008). Artistic and Music Director of Houston Grand Opera, Summers has frequently conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu, Welsh National Opera, the Dallas Opera, Opera Australia, Seattle Opera, Lisbon Opera, Bordeaux Opera, and the Bregenz Festival, among many others.

This stunning English National Opera production was created by internationally acclaimed director Nicholas Hytner, with sets and costumes designed by David Fielding and lighting designed by Paul Pyant. Equally at home in theater, opera and film, Nicholas Hytner currently serves as artistic director of London's Royal National Theatre. A three-time Olivier-award winner, Nicholas Hytner has directed everything from *Le Nozze di Figaro* to *Miss Saigon* and the well-known film *The Madness of King George*. Michael Walling makes his San Francisco Opera debut directing this revival which he has previously led at English National Opera and Houston Grand Opera. His other opera credits

include *Nixon in China* at Greek National Opera, and *La Bohème* and *Die Walküre* at English National Opera.

Sung in Italian with English supertitles, the six performances of *Xerxes* are scheduled for October 30 (1:30 p.m.), November 4 (7:30 p.m.), November 8 (7:30 p.m.), November 11 (7:30 p.m.), November 16 (7 p.m.) and November 19 (7:30 p.m.), 2011.

Insight Panel Discussion

San Francisco Opera Guild will present an Insight Panel Discussion featuring members of the cast and production team from *Xerxes*. The discussion will take place on Monday, October 24 at 6 p.m. in the Herbst Theater at the War Memorial Veterans Building (401 Van Ness Avenue). Insight panels are free for Opera members and \$5 for the general public; tickets can be purchased at the door 30 minutes prior to the discussion.

Tickets and Information

Tickets for the performance of Handel's *Xerxes* are priced from \$21 to \$330 and may be purchased at sfopera.com or through the San Francisco Opera Box Office [301 Van Ness Avenue (at Grove Street), or by phone at (415) 864-3330]. Standing Room tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. on the day of each performance; tickets are \$10 each, cash only.

All performances will feature an informative Opera Talk by musicologist Joseph Calver. Talks begin fifty-five minutes before each performance in the orchestra section of the War Memorial Opera House and are presented free of charge to patrons with tickets for the corresponding performance.

The War Memorial Opera House is located at 301 Van Ness Avenue at Grove Street. Patrons are encouraged to use public transportation to attend San Francisco Opera performances. The War Memorial Opera House is within walking distance of the Civic Center BART station and near numerous bus lines, including 5, 21, 47, 49 and the F Market Street. For more public transportation information, visit bart.gov and sfmuni.com.

Casting, programs, schedules and ticket prices are subject to change. For further information about *Xerxes* and San Francisco Opera's 2011–12 season, please visit sfopera.com.

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This production is made possible, in part, by The Bernard Osher Endowment Fund. Ms. Graham's and Mr. Daniels' appearances made possible by a gift to the Great Singers Fund by Joan and David Traitel.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera. Pianos provided by Music Exchange.



2011–12 Season Sponsor

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This press release and downloadable 2011-12 Season photographs are available at sfopera.com/press

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XERXES: PRODUCTION INFORMATION

XERXES by George Frideric Handel

English National Opera production

Anonymous revision of Silvio Stampiglia's
libretto *Il Xerse*, based on Nicolo Minato's *Il Xerse*
Approximate running time: 3 hours forty minutes with two intermissions
Sung in Italian with English supertitles
First Performance: London, April 15, 1738

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA PREMIERE
October 30^o (1:30 p.m.); **November 4** (7:30 p.m.),
8^o (7:30 p.m.), **11^o** (7:30 p.m.), **16** (7 p.m.),
19 (7:30 p.m.), **2011**

Cast:

Production Team:

Xerxes
Romilda
Arsamenes
Atalanta
Amastris
Ariodates
Elviro

Susan Graham
Lisette Oropesa*♪
David Daniels
Heidi Stober
Sonia Prina
Wayne Tigges♪
Michael Sumuel♪

Conductor
Original Director
Director
Production Designer
Lighting Designer
Chorus Director

Patrick Summers
Nicholas Hytner
Michael Walling*
David Fielding*
Paul Pyant
Ian Robertson

* San Francisco Opera Debut ♪Role Debut • OperaVision performance

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

American mezzo-soprano **SUSAN GRAHAM** (*Xerxes*) made her San Francisco Opera debut as Minerva in the 1990 production of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and returned in subsequent productions of *La Clemenza di Tito* (Annius), *Der Rosenkavalier* (Octavian), and the title role of *Ariodante*, in addition to creating the role of Sister Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking*. The Merola Opera Program alumna also appeared with the Company in the title role of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, a role she has performed to great acclaim at Royal Opera, Covent Garden; the Metropolitan Opera; Madrid's Teatro Real; Paris Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the Salzburg Festival. Other recent career highlights include the title roles of *The Merry Widow* and *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* at Los Angeles Opera; Sesto (*La Clemenza di Tito*), Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Marguerite (*La Damnation de Faust*), the Composer (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Octavian at the Metropolitan Opera, as well as creating the role of Sondra Finchley in Tobias Picker's world premiere of *An American Tragedy* with that company; *Poppea* in Florence; *Charlotte (Werther)* in Paris and Munich; Marguerite (*La Damnation de Faust*) with Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the Composer and the title role of *Xerxes* with Houston Grand Opera. She was named *Musical America's* 2004 Vocalist of the Year and holds the French Government's highest artistic title, *Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. Upcoming engagements this season include a recital tour at numerous venues, including Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, as well as the title role of *The Merry Widow* with Paris Opera.

American soprano **LISETTE OROPESA** (*Romilda*) makes her San Francisco Opera debut this fall. A graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Artist Program, her engagements with that company include Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Woglinde (*Das Rheingold, Götterdämmerung*), Lisette (*La Rondine*), the Forest Bird (*Siegfried*), and Amor (*Orfeo ed Euridice*). Recent engagements include the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, her Bavarian State Opera debut as Ismene (*Mitradate, Re di Ponto*), and Leïla (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*) with New Orleans Opera. Other career highlights include Konstanze (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*) at Welsh National Opera, Nannetta (*Falstaff*) in Bilbao; Fiorilla (*Il Turco in Italia*) at Deutsche Oper am Rhein; the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Opera New Jersey; and Gilda (*Rigoletto*) with Arizona Opera. In concert, she has appeared as a soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Tanglewood Music Festival, the Ravinia Festival, and at Carnegie Hall. Oropesa has won numerous awards and competitions, including the 2009 Richard Tucker Music Foundation Career Grant, the 2005 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, first place award presented by the Gerda Lissner Foundation and the Licia Albanese Puccini Competition, a George London Award, and the Zarzuela Award and third place in the Operalia Competition.

DAVID DANIELS (*Arsamenes*) made his San Francisco Opera debut as Nerone in 1998's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and returned in the title role of *Giulio Cesare* (2002) and as Bertarido (*Rodelinda*, 2005). Recent engagements include a return to the Metropolitan Opera in the title role in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, which he also sang with the Minnesota Opera; Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Lichas (*Hercules*) with Lyric Opera of Chicago; and Roberto (Vivaldi's *Griselda*) with the Santa Fe Opera. Highlights of recent seasons include Bertarido at the Met; Orfeo at the Met, Covent Garden, and Lyric Opera of Chicago; the title role of *Orlando* with Munich's Bavarian State Opera; the title role of *Tamerlano* with Washington National Opera and Bavarian State Opera; Didymus (*Theodora*) at the Glyndebourne Festival; the title role of *Giulio Cesare* at the Met, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Glyndebourne Festival; Arsace (*Partenope*) at Vienna's Theater an der Wien and Lyric Opera of Chicago; the title role of *Radamisto* with the Santa Fe Opera; and Oberon with the Met, Milan's La Scala, and Barcelona's Teatre del Liceu (available on DVD). An exclusive Virgin Classics recording artist with several critically-acclaimed and best-selling solo albums to his credit, Daniels's latest release is a collection of Bach's Sacred Arias and Cantatas. Other recordings include a recording of Handel's *Rinaldo* on the Decca label, which received a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice Album of the Year award in 2002. Daniels was the recipient of *Musical America's* Vocalist of the Year for 1999 and the 1997 Richard Tucker Award.

HEIDI STOBER (*Atalanta*) made her San Francisco Opera debut as Sophie in 2010's *Werther* and returned as Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*); she returns to the Company next summer as Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. The American soprano's recent engagements include Pamina, Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Micaëla (*Carmen*), and Ascagne (*Les Troyens*) with Deutsche Oper Berlin as well as Musetta (*La Bohème*) with the Santa Fe Opera. A graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, her credits with that company include *Atalanta*, *Blonde (Die Entführung aus dem Serail)*, *Drusilla (L'Incoronazione di Poppea)*, *Norina (Don Pasquale)*, *Susanna (Le Nozze di Figaro)*, *Xenia (Boris Godunov)*, *The Rose (Portman's The Little Prince)*, and *La China* in the world premiere of Catán's *Salsipuedes*. Stober's other career highlights include *Anne Trulove (The Rake's Progress)* with St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; *Oscar (Un Ballo in Maschera)* and *Nannetta (Falstaff)* with Deutsche Oper Berlin; *Poppea (Agrippina)* with New York City Opera; *Tigrane (Radamisto)* and *La Folie and Thalie (Platée)* with the Santa Fe Opera; *Morgana (Alcina)* in Santiago, Chile; *Aminta (Il Re Pastore)* with Opera Theatre of St. Louis; and *Leïla (Les Pêcheurs de Perles)* at Opera Colorado. Upcoming engagements include *Zerlina (Don Giovanni)*, *Pamina, Oscar (Un Ballo in Maschera)*, *Roggiero (Tancredi)*, and *Micaëla (Carmen)* with Deutsche Oper Berlin, *Gretel* with the Metropolitan Opera, and *Zdenka (Arabella)* at the Santa Fe Opera.

SONIA PRINA (*Amastris*) made her U.S. debut with San Francisco Opera as Polinesso in 2008's *Ariodante*, a role she has sung at Munich's Bavarian State Opera and Barcelona's Teatre del Liceu. The Italian contralto studied at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan, where she earned degrees in trumpet and voice. A graduate of La Scala's vocal academy for young singers, her career highlights include *Bradamante (Alcina)* at Paris Opera and in Munich; *Clarice (La Pietra del Paragone)* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris; the title role of *Rinaldo* at La Scala; and the title role of Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba* at the Salzburg Festival. Prina has a particular fondness for Handel and has sung the title roles of many of his operas: *Giulio Cesare* in Genoa and Lille, *Orlando* in Ravenna, *Amadigi di Gaula* at the Teatro San Carlo, and *Silla* in Rome. Her discography includes Vivaldi's *La Senna Festeggiante* and *L'Olimpiade* (Naïve); Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (Virgin); and Handel's *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (EMI/Virgin), *Lotario* (BMG), and *Rodelinda* (Deutsche Grammophon). She is featured in

DVD recordings of *Ascanio in Alba* (Salzburg Festival) and *La Pietra del Paragone* (Théâtre du Châtelet). Prina's recent engagements include Orfeo at the Teatro Real; Ratmir (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*) for the re-opening of Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre; and the title roles of *Orlando* (Opera Australia), *Tamerlano* (Bavarian State Opera), and *Rinaldo* (Glyndebourne Festival).

WAYNE TIGGES (*Ariodates*) made his San Francisco Opera debut this season creating the roles of Sam and Wesley in the world premiere of *Heart of a Soldier*; he returns later this fall as Zuniga (*Carmen*). The American bass-baritone's recent engagements include Willy Wonka in the European premiere of Peter Ash's *The Golden Ticket* at the Wexford Festival; Escamillo (*Carmen*) and Leporello (*Don Giovanni*) at the San Diego Opera; Jochanaan (*Salome*) with Arizona Opera; Basilio (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) with Opera Colorado and Lyric Opera of Chicago; Donner (*Das Rheingold*), Escamillo, Zuniga (*Carmen*), and the Bonze (*Madama Butterfly*) with Los Angeles Opera; the Vicar (*Albert Herring*), Basilio, and Hercules (*Alceste*) with the Santa Fe Opera; Escamillo at the Glyndebourne Festival; Kolenatý (*The Makropulos Case*) with Paris Opera; and Achilla (*Giulio Cesare*) with the Metropolitan Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. A graduate of Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center, Tigges's other roles with that company include the title role of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Capulet (*Roméo et Juliette*), Angelotti (*Tosca*), Sam (*Un Ballo in Maschera*), and the Bonze; he also created the role of Snook in Bolcom's *A Wedding*.

American bass-baritone **MICHAEL SUMUEL** (*Elviro*) made his San Francisco Opera debut earlier this season creating the roles of Tom and Ted in the world premiere of *Heart of a Soldier*. An alumnus of the 2009 Merola Opera Program, he is also a Houston Grand Opera Studio alumnus and appeared with that company this past spring as Antonio (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and a Lackey (*Ariadne auf Naxos*). Sumuel's other credits in Houston include Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), a Motorcycle Cop (Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*), and Dulcamara (*L'Elisir d'Amore*); he also sang Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*) with the Houston Grand Opera Studio. His awards include a 2010 Richard F. Gold Career Grant from the Shoshana Foundation and third place in the 2009 Eleanor McCollum Competition. Sumuel recently completed his second season as a Filene Young Artist at Wolf Trap Opera. Upcoming engagements include his European debut as Schaunard (*La Bohème*) at the Glyndebourne Festival.

Houston Grand Opera Artistic and Music Director and Principal Guest Conductor for San Francisco Opera, **PATRICK SUMMERS** has led a vast repertory for the Company, including *Ariodante*; *Samson et Dalila*; *Iphigénie en Tauride*; *Il Trittico*; the world premieres of André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1998), Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* (2000), and Christopher Theofanidis and Donna Di Novelli's *Heart of a Soldier* (2011); and the West Coast premiere of Heggie's *Three Decembers* (2008). Summers has twice received Merola Opera Program's Otto Guth Award and was named its "Distinguished Alumnus" in 2001. The maestro has led an array of productions at the Metropolitan Opera, including *La Traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Così fan tutte*, *I Puritani*, and *Rodelinda*, as well as *Madama Butterfly* and *Salome*, which were both broadcast live in HD to movie theaters around the world. Last season he conducted *Iphigénie en Tauride* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* with that company. Summers is also a regular guest with the world's preeminent opera companies, including Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu, Welsh National Opera, the Dallas Opera, Opera Australia, Seattle Opera, Lisbon Opera, Bordeaux Opera, and the Bregenz Festival, among many others. His most recent world premieres include Previn's *Brief Encounter* at Houston Grand Opera and Paul Moravec's *The Letter* at the Santa Fe Opera. Summers has overseen many of Houston Grand

Opera's important artistic advances, including the formation of its own orchestra, the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra. During his tenure, he has supervised and conducted seven world premieres as well as many seminal opera works not previously mounted by the company. The Indiana University graduate was named Stolichnaya's "Artist of the Year" in 1998.

Internationally acclaimed director **NICHOLAS HYTNER** is equally at home in theater, opera and film. He currently serves as artistic director of London's Royal National Theatre. Hytner began his career with Kent Opera where his productions included *The Turn of the Screw*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *King Priam*. Subsequent productions include *The King Goes Forth to France*, and *The Knot Garden* for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; *Rienzi*, *The Force of Destiny*, and *Xerxes* with English National Opera; *Giulio Cesare* and *The Cunning Little Vixen* with Paris Opera; *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Geneva; *La Clemenza di Tito* at the Glyndebourne Festival; and *Don Giovanni* in Munich. Theater productions include Schiller's *Don Carlos* at the Royal Exchange; *Miss Saigon* in London's West End and on Broadway; *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *King Lear* for the Royal Shakespeare Company; *Volpone* at the Almeida; *The Importance of Being Ernest* at the Aldwych; and *Ghetto*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Madness of George III* (which he has also filmed to great critical acclaim), *The Recruiting Officer*, and *Carousel* for the Royal National Theatre.

MICHAEL WALLING (*Revival Director*) makes his debut with San Francisco Opera in 2011 with Nicholas Hytner's revival production that he has led at English National Opera and Houston Grand Opera. The British director's other opera credits include *Nixon in China* at Greek National Opera, and *La Bohème* and *Die Walküre* at English National Opera. Walling is the founder and artistic director of Border Crossings, a theater company based in the U.K. He has directed numerous productions across four continents, winning awards for *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the U.S. and *Paul & Virginie* in Mauritius. Productions elsewhere include *The Good Soul of Szechuan*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Victory*, *Hard Times*, *The Art of Success*, *Macbeth*, *The Great God Brown*, *Play with Cocaine*, *Beardsley*, *Spokesong*, *Sir Thomas More*. Walling studied history at Oxford University and subsequently trained at Trinity College, Dublin.