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Take Care

A NEW OPERA
ABOUT A CARER

Douglas Finch Composer
Cindy Oswin Librettist

Djanogly Theatre, Lakeside Arts
2 & 3 April 2022

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Supported using public funding by
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Introduction & Welcome

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the world premiere of the opera *Take Care* by composer Douglas Finch and librettist Cindy Oswin at Lakeside Arts, University of Nottingham.

Almost ten years ago, in 2013, Lakeside Arts, Meeting Ground Theatre and Professor Justine Schneider of The Institute of Mental Health's Centre for Dementia created a new play *Inside Out of Mind* based on observational research conducted on three dementia care wards. That powerful theatrical experience deeply affected composer Douglas Finch and sparked conversations with Justine Schneider about the emotional possibilities of music to further public understanding of the role of the dementia carer.

Extensive research led by Professor Justine Schneider in 2016-18 through the BOUGH study (Broadening our Understanding of Good Home Care) funded by the National Institute for Health Research provided significant insights into the lives of those who care for people with dementia in their homes. These findings were the impetus for commissioning Douglas Finch to compose an opera that focuses on the role of the carer in the home from their professional and personal perspective.

In the UK about 800,000 people, two-thirds of whom have dementia, rely on home carers to support daily life. The failings of home care services are widely known, but this research set out to uncover the features of high-quality care for people with dementia at the interpersonal level. In the study that informs the opera, researchers provided home care in six households over eleven months. Care workers kept diaries on the job. Relatives, care workers and their managers were interviewed. Under a confidentiality agreement, research notes were shared with the composer and librettist who were given a free hand to interpret the findings.

In the research, participant observers studied the lives of those who care for people with dementia at home; both as family members and as paid professionals. Through the rich medium of opera we aim to share a heightened representation of day-to-day care for people with dementia, thereby elevating the status of carers and shining a light on their emotional labour.

Why commission an opera? In opera, the combination of singing, acting and music can convey complex messages about human experience and emotions. We wanted to draw attention to the experience of giving and receiving care, to the high level of empathy required, and to the impact on the carer. Our research explored love, loss and dementia. As audience members absorb the beauty of *Take Care*, they may also reflect on these themes in their own lives.

Synopsis

Take Care, an opera in eight scenes, centres on the working life of Katie, a young carer for older people living with dementia. The music captures the often-chaotic emotional turmoil of dementia as well as moments of humour, insight and love in Katie's relationship with the people for whom she cares. We follow her through the daily visits to her five clients: Myrtle, well-off but lonely - troubled and confused by her relationship with her daughter; Joyce, often irascible, who used to feel great love and tenderness towards her husband Harry, but now hardly recognises him; Harry, proud of the work he used to do as a coal miner, now lamenting his growing physical frailty and his wife's decline; and Eileen (represented by a puppet), in the late stages of dementia and at the end of life, but calm and content, spending much of her waking hours singing hymns.

Overture:

Katie is taking her daughter to nursery. It is raining and they are late.

Scene One:

Myrtle is in bed at home. She is still involved in her dream and is reluctant to eat, dress and especially, shower.

Scene Two:

Joyce is outside her house watering plants. Katie goes inside to Harry, who is bird watching through binoculars. Harry and Joyce squabble as they eat breakfast. Katie tries to keep the peace.

Scene Three:

Katie is massaging cream into Myrtle's legs. Myrtle can't remember when her daughter will next visit. Katie reminds her but Myrtle regrets that she doesn't really know her daughter anyway.

Scene Four:

Harry muses about his former life as a miner. Joyce watches motor racing on TV.

Scene Five:

Katie is giving Eileen a wash in bed. Eileen doesn't speak but loves singing hymns. As Katie fills in her timesheet, Eileen dies. Katie sings Eileen's last hymn 'Lead Kindly Light' with the chorus.

Scene Six:

Katie's conscience, sung by the chorus, blames her for the death of Eileen. Joyce is watching motor-racing on TV. Katie joins Harry outside. Harry comforts her and thinks about his own life and death. Joyce startles them both through the window.

Scene Seven:

Katie learns that Myrtle is going into a care home. Katie asks if she might visit Myrtle, and Vivian agrees. Katie hopes that Myrtle will be well looked after.

Scene Eight:

Katie can't get into Joyce and Harry's house so climbs through the window. Harry is on the floor. Katie dials emergency services. Joyce is confused, frightened and struggling to remember her earlier feelings for Harry. The paramedics arrive. Katie is now very late to collect her daughter from nursery.

End

Cindy Oswin, librettist, interviews composer Douglas Finch

Cindy Oswin: Douglas, when you first asked me to write the libretto for *Take Care*, you had already selected from the huge amount of field notes on the carers' experiences – how did you make the selection?

Douglas Finch: I was mainly looking for details that struck a chord with me, like the carer's tick-list, or a client's fixation on bird watching. I think we both felt that the ordinary stuff such as helping the client shower and dress or making simple meals, should be treated as elemental.

But how did *you* arrive at the idea of having three separate stories joined together through the experience of a young, inexperienced carer?

CO: I wanted to show the range of a home carer's duties through three stories and five characters with different, complex needs which involve her having to be nurse, confidante and psychologist. I was concerned with the time pressure on the carer; from the rush of getting her daughter to nursery, to being able to stay when someone is in distress – she is always up against time.

How did you approach the subject musically?

DF: Your idea of multiple stories gave me the freedom to use a multi-style approach. I treated each scene as a separate piece with its own musical characteristics. For example, the second scene featuring Joyce and Harry is based on old music hall songs, while the scene with Myrtle is a tender yet tense lullaby. The final chaotic scene is a fusion of minimalist pattern music with lush melodrama. There are musical refrains, but they serve a wider psychological function to do with memory and emotion.

CO: Yes, in opera the music carries the emotion, so the libretto needs to be quite simple. In this opera, I have used mostly conversational language, to be true to the characters but also to help communicate the sung dialogue.

DF: We also imagined the singers using a varied approach to vocal delivery: spoken, non-vibrato and more traditional operatic style. I think this has helped us make a more intimate kind of drama that will resonate with the audience through these very human stories.

Cast and Creatives

Composer	Douglas Finch
Librettist	Cindy Oswin
Director	Mervyn Millar
Music Director	Jonathan Tilbrook

Cast

Katie	Donna Bateman
Myrtle	Jane Streeton
Joyce/Eileen	Violetta Gawara
Harry	John Upperton
Vivian	Angela Warren

Puppeteers

Ryan Ashe
Charlotte Wright

Orchestra

Violin	Tamaki Higashi
Violin	Rebecca Hart
Viola	Carmen Flores
Cello	Eleanor Conroy
Flute	Jessamy Robinson
Oboe	Simon Dewhurst
Clarinet	Sophia-Isabella Gutierrez
Bass clarinet	Emily Wilson
Percussion	Rosie Clark
Piano & Repetiteur	Joseph Havlat
Assistant Repetiteurs	Bobbie Chen Rob Challinor Tom Bates

Chorus

Sylvia Berry
Sharon Bramwell
Becky Dowson
Martin Orrell
Emma Poynton-Smith
Christine Rhodes
Colin Salway
Lily Taylor-Ward
Jonathan Waite
Angela Warren
Ian Watts
Ruth Willott

Production

Stage design	Ella Burrell
Costume design	Felicity Walsh-Mangham
Puppet construction	Alison Duddle
Lighting design	Christopher Flux
Sound design	Finn Dwyer
Movement direction	Sophie Thorpe
Producer/Production Manager	Beth Hoare-Barnes
Technical Manager	Richard Statham
Stage Manager	Joanne Davies
Assistant Stage Manager	Joseph Lenehan
Design mentors	Totie Driver Sean Myatt
Surtitles	Ned Hooley
Researchers	Samantha Wilkinson Lucy Perry-Young
Executive producers	Catherine Hocking Justine Schneider

Cast



Donna Bateman **Katie**

Donna Bateman is an award-winning soprano who has been honored as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music for her services to music. Career highlights include her debut for The Royal Opera House, ROH2, in *The Gentle Giant* and *Lulu* in American Lulu - Neuwirth/Berg for Young Vic, Scottish Opera and Bregenz co-production. She is thrilled to be reconnecting with Opera here in Nottingham, the city where she discovered it.



Jane Streeton **Myrtle**

Jane Streeton, soprano, studied at the RCM and has sung as soloist in operas and concerts in the UK, Europe, USA, Russia and Japan. She has performed with many UK opera companies, for example singing the title roles in *The Merry Widow* for Opera Holland Park and *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Midsummer Opera. She has sung in various Festivals and recorded on Hyperion. Jane has appeared as soloist with various orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.



Violetta Gawara **Joyce/Eileen**

Violetta Gawara, mezzo soprano, was born in Poland and studied there. She made her London debut with English Bach Festival at the Banqueting House under Laurence Cummings, singing Proserpina in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*. She also performed for Grange Park Opera, Hampstead Garden Opera, Pavilion Opera, Heritage Opera, European Chamber Opera, Villa in Canto and Opera at Home. As a soloist of Camerata Silesia she has appeared on many recordings, notably Bach Cantata BWV150 and G.G.Gorczycki Completorium with Emma Kirkby.



John Upperton **Harry**

John Upperton, tenor, was born in Co. Durham and studied Music at the University of Liverpool before attending a postgraduate singing course at the Royal College of Music. As well as the major Wagnerian and other dramatic tenor roles, John has a long history of singing contemporary music and has created several new roles by living composers. A wide concert repertoire includes the Verdi Requiem, *The Dream of Gerontius* and works by Janáček.

Carers' Chorus

Angela Warren

In the 1990s I worked as a carer in residential homes in the London Borough of Hillingdon. While there I sang with the residents.

Becky Dowson

I am a music therapist and University of Nottingham researcher with 10 years' experience of working in dementia care. My particular research interest is group singing for people with dementia.

Christine Rhodes

My husband John had difficulty doing simple tasks 8 years ago, e.g. turning a sleeve the right way out. Decline was slow but inevitable. He got pneumonia and died last year.

Emma Poynton-Smith

I am a junior doctor and helped care for my grandmother ("Nannie") for 6 years after her diagnosis of dementia, assisting her at home and visiting her at the care home and hospital.

Jonathan Waite

I was consultant psychiatrist for older people in Rushcliffe from 1984 to 2010, then consultant at QMC and dementia lead for NHS East Midlands until 2017.

Lily Taylor-Ward

I'm a singer who works alongside Age UK using music to evoke memories in their dementia groups. It's so rewarding, music is certainly a healing therapy.

Ruth Willott

I am a hospital doctor who specialises in the care of older patients, particularly those patients with dementia. I have sung in a number of groups and choirs and currently sing with Nottingham Harmonic Choir.

Sharon Bramwell

My caring role has progressed since 2016, in line with my mother's dementia. I am totally in awe of her substance having raised 12 beautiful children.

Sylvia Berry

Over the past few years my husband has become increasingly frail with various health issues culminating in a diagnosis of dementia. As a result I have now become his full time carer.

Martin Orrell

I am an old age psychiatrist and academic from the Institute of Mental Health. I helped look after my mother who had dementia for several years.



Orchestra

Tamaki Higashi **Violin**

Tamaki is the second violinist of the Villiers Quartet. She is a passionate chamber musician and loves to bring music to wider audiences.

Rebecca Hart **Violin**

Rebecca is a third-year music student at the University of Nottingham, she is specialising in performance this year and is working towards her final recital.

Carmen Flores **Viola**

Carmen has performed as Principal Viola with orchestras in the UK and abroad with ensembles including the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Canadian Opera Company, English National Opera, English Chamber Orchestra, and Britten Sinfonia. A resident of Beeston, she is a founding member of the Villiers Quartet and director of the Nottingham Chamber Music Festival

Eleanor Conroy **Cello**

Eleanor is a third-year music student at the University of Nottingham and is working towards her final year recital and dissertation.

Jessamy Robinson **Flute**

Jessamy is a PGCE student at the University of Nottingham, working to become a secondary music teacher after gaining her Master of Music at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

Simon Dewhurst **Oboe**

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, Simon has won awards for contemporary and chamber music. Working with numerous ensembles, he has performed at every major orchestral and chamber music venue in Britain.

Sophia-Isabella Gutierrez **Clarinet**

Sophia is a first-year Liberal Arts student at the University of Nottingham, and she is currently studying 20th Century Music and Spanish.

Emily Wilson **Bass Clarinet**

Emily graduated from the RNCM in 2016. Her freelance work includes orchestral extras work with the CBSO, RLPO and BCMG, and teaching clarinet at the University of Sheffield.

Rosie Clark **Percussion**

Rosie is a first-year music student at the University of Nottingham currently studying Performance and is hoping to incorporate Psychology next year

Joseph Havlat **Piano**

Joseph is an Australian-born pianist and composer based in London. He is a regular soloist and chamber musician, and has a strong interest in contemporary music.



Creatives



Douglas Finch **Composer**

Born in Winnipeg, Douglas Finch's career began as a pianist after winning a silver medal in the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. He premiered his early piano pieces on CBC Radio, where he also became known for his spontaneous improvisations in recital. After moving to the UK he became joint artistic director of The Continuum Ensemble in London. He composed music for six films with British director Jon Sanders, the latest of which, *A Clever Woman* will open across the country in late May. He teaches piano and composition at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London.



Cindy Oswin **Librettist**

Cindy Oswin's libretto writing for opera includes: *A Better Place*, composer Martin Butler for the English National Opera, and *Look No Hands*, composer Errollyn Wallen for Mecklenburgh Opera. Theatre masques and jigs for Shakespeare's Globe include *The Triumph of Hope* for the royal opening event and *The Masque of Heaven and Earth*. Her new solo play *Cell* about the life and work of 14th century mystic, Julian of Norwich who was the first woman to write in English, opens in Oxford in July and at the British Library in September 2022.



Mervyn Millar **Director**

Mervyn Millar is a theatre director with a special interest in experimental and innovative cross-artform work. He was Director of the Finborough Theatre and directed seven productions there. Other directing work includes *The Hatchling* (Trigger) Crow (Festival 2012), *Stiller* (Bayerische Staatsschauspiel) and *Evidence for the Existence of Borrowers* (Kazuko Hohki). Extensive experience as a puppetry director includes *Aïda* (Opera de Paris), *Fox-Tot!* (Scottish Opera), *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* (Opera National du Rhin), *War Horse* (London, New York, Toronto, Berlin), *Circus 1903*, *Appreciate* (Paul McCartney), and internationally including the Royal Opera House, Burgtheater Vienna and Schauspielhaus Zurich. In 2010 he was awarded a Fellowship by the Arts Foundation.



Jonathan Tilbrook **Music Director**

Jonathan Tilbrook is a versatile conductor whose career has included performances at major venues throughout the UK, Europe, New Zealand and the Far East. He has been Assistant Conductor with the Martinů Philharmonic (Czech Republic) and guest conductor of the Janáček and Košice State Philharmonic orchestras. He has worked with ensembles including the Croatian Radio Symphony Orchestra and National Theatre, Zagreb, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Moravian Philharmonic, Hong Kong Sinfonietta; contemporary music groups Gemini, One Voice and Mephisto Ensemble. He has conducted operas in London and UK festivals including Brighton, Cheltenham, King's Lynn and Holland Park. Jonathan is Head of Orchestral Studies at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London, and the Mackerras Conducting Fellow at the University of Nottingham.

Creatives

Ella Burrell **Stage Design**

Ella is a third-year student on the BA Theatre Design course at Nottingham Trent University. This is her first show as a set designer, she has previously worked as the scenic build and textile construction team for the musical 'Jingah Island' (Squire Performing Arts Centre).

Felicity Walsh-Mangham **Costume Design**

Fliss is a final year BA Theatre Design Student at NTU. This is her first show as costume designer. She's previously been part of scenic art, construction, and wardrobe teams for 'Jingah Island' at The Squire PAC and TV Workshop productions of 'Macbeth' and 'The House on the Edge of Innocence'.

Alison Duddle **Puppet Design**

Alison is a freelance artist, puppet and mask maker and director. Alison makes both tiny and gigantic puppets and masks for theatre, TV, film and outdoor spectacle. She has a company called A Bird in the Hand Theatre.

Christopher Flux **Lighting Design**

Christopher studied Stage Management and Technical Theatre at Queen Margaret's University Edinburgh. His recent design work includes: 'Squidge', 'Colour of Me', 'Five, Five Years', 'Ventoux', 'Losing her Voice' and Lakeside's Chinese New Year celebrations at the University of Nottingham. He has also production managed the international tours of Aditi Mangaldas since 2016 including 'Within', 'Inter_rupted' and 'Forbidden'.

Finn Dwyer **Sound Design**

Finn Dwyer is a second-year student studying Music and Music Technology at the University of Nottingham. Prior theatre experience includes 'Goblin Market' and 'Double Oh Seven' at Nottingham New Theatre, the University's only entirely student-run theatre in England.

About Lakeside Arts

Lakeside Arts is the University of Nottingham's public arts programme engaging more than 180,000 people of all ages and abilities annually. We aim to champion and nurture talent and to engage diverse audiences with inspirational creative experiences across visual, performing and participatory arts.

As part of the University we have the opportunity to broker relationships between creatives and the academic community. This opera is one example of our ability to both support research outcomes through creative interventions and foster public engagement with research. Another recent example would include the Djanogly Gallery exhibition *The Eye As Witness* focused on Professor Maiken Umbach's research into perpetrator photography in partnership with the National Holocaust Museum; there is currently ongoing research with Makers of Imaginary Worlds and the Mixed Reality Lab to engage children with creative technologies.

We first collaborated with Professor Justine Schneider and the Institute of Mental Health to deliver a creative realisation of her extensive research into the lives of those with dementia and the people that care for them in 2013. The result was the live theatre production *Inside Out of Mind*, a partnership between Meeting Ground Theatre Company and Lakeside Arts. It premiered to capacity audiences of NHS care workers and general public with caring responsibilities. In 2015 it toured nationally where it was acclaimed by audiences and in 2016 it was shortlisted for the National Lottery Awards.

In 2019, Lakeside produced its first fully staged opera production, *Losing Her Voice* by composer Elizabeth Kelly, Associate Professor of Composition in the Department of Music. Taking an innovative and interdisciplinary approach, *Losing Her Voice* was inspired by the life of the early twentieth-century American opera diva Geraldine Farrar and brought together a cast of professional and student musicians alongside researchers in interactive digital technologies at the University.

Take Care continues this collaborative approach. Joining the cast of wonderful professional singers is a chorus of 12 local dementia carers, both professional and unpaid. University of Nottingham students perform with professional musicians in the orchestra, with sound design by a music technology student. Nottingham Trent University theatre design students have designed the costumes and set as part of their degree. The opportunity for students, amateur and professional creatives to work together to bring this new, important opera to life is one of which Lakeside Arts is immensely proud.

Acknowledgements

Alex Elliott
Andrew Clarke
Becky Dowson
Elizabeth Kelly
Mervyn Cooke
Archie McLellan
Anna Mottram
Tanya Myers
Jon Sanders
Alexia Mankovskaya
Mahsa Salali
Colin Salway
Ian Watts
Robin Hutchinson

The BOUGH team led by Justine Schneider included Lucy Perry Young, Samantha Wilkinson, Kristian Pollock, Nicola Turner, Anthony Kelly, Nick Manning and Kezia Scales. The team would like to thank the families and home care personnel who participated in the BOUGH study.

Disclaimer

The BOUGH study (Broadening our Understanding of Good Home Care) was funded by the National Institute for Health Research School for Social Care Research (Reference C088/T14-035, 2016-18). The views expressed in this production are those of the creative team and not necessarily those of the NIHR SSCR, NHS, the National Institute for Health Research or the Department of Health. The research received ethical approval from the UK Health Research Authority Social Care Research Ethics Committee (Reference 15/IEC08/0043).

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