



DAVID BRUCE

Composer

Creating work for children does not mean being patronising or having lower standards. I really didn't think of the opera as being specifically for children when I was writing it. But when you do think about an audience of children, what it really forces you to do is not to accept any of the looseness, sloppy thinking or lack of clarity that you might get away with if you had a less demanding (adult) audience!

Inspiring people no. 2: composer of *The Firework Maker's Daughter*, an opera for children based on the book by Philip Pullman



How did it start?

The process started with The Opera Group about three years ago, with help and support from Opera North, the Royal Opera House and Watford Palace Theatre. Philip Pullman attended an early workshop, then was happy to hand the project over. We have made a few small adjustments to the story but have remained pretty faithful to the original.

Our production really takes great pleasure not just in the art of storytelling on stage, but also showing you how it's done. We see the orchestra on stage and we see the shadow-puppet specialists, Steve and Sally Tiplady, creating their magical effects using little more than overhead projectors, marker pens and lots of carefully cut bits of cardboard!

Do you have a favourite opera?

It's probably *The Makropulos Case* by Janacek. It's about a woman who takes an elixir of life and lives to be 300 years old before finally realising that it's better to have a short, meaningful life than a long, meaningless one. Also Mozart's *Magic Flute*, which was at the back of my mind when I was writing *The Firework Maker's Daughter* because both combine fun with real operatic emotion.

David Bruce was interviewed by Vicky Ireland for Action for Children's Arts

Was it fun to write?

It was! I am naturally a visual composer, so the huge variety of colours in the story were a real treat. I enjoyed the challenges too, such as having to come up with not one but three firework displays at the end of the show! The opera celebrates the sense of wonder – it's the sense of wonder at creating fireworks that drives the heroine, Lila, so it's a story that means a lot to artists generally. And the kids have been loving it. It's a great joy when I leave the show amidst the audience and hear kids chattering away excitedly about the show or even imitating the sound of an opera singer!