

LONGBOROUGH FESTIVAL OPERA 2026 PROGRAMME PRESENTS THREE NEW PRODUCTIONS AND A CELEBRATED REVIVAL



Longborough opera house façade ©Matthew Williams-Ellis

- **The world-class opera festival in the Cotswolds presents new productions of Handel’s *Orlando*, Verdi’s *Macbeth* and Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* alongside a revival of its acclaimed 2017 *Tristan und Isolde***
- **Set overlooking the Evenlode valley in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the festival offers bold stagings, exceptional artists and an intimate theatrical experience shaped by its unique setting**
- **Championing both emerging British talent and established international singers, this year’s LFO includes role debuts, rising talent in leading roles and a new partnership with Academy of Ancient Music**

The former chicken shed that has evolved into one of the world’s leading summer opera destinations returns from 30 May to 8 August 2026 with a typically bold and wide-ranging programme. Nestled in the heart of the Cotswolds, Longborough Festival Opera (LFO) presents outstanding productions led by acclaimed conductors and directors, and this season presents three new stagings of Handel’s *Orlando*, Verdi’s *Macbeth* and Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, alongside a revival of its celebrated 2017 *Tristan und Isolde*.

Since Martin and Lizzie Graham began hosting summer opera on their land in 1991 - and building an opera house in 1997- Longborough Festival Opera has established a formidable international reputation for ambitious, high-quality productions, particularly its acclaimed

stagings of Wagner. Under the bold artistic leadership of Polly Graham since 2018, the company has continued to broaden and grow, culminating in an ambitious staging of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in 2024, offering visitors a diverse repertoire delivered with exceptional standards in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

The first of the new productions in 2026, *Orlando* is the first Handel opera at Longborough since 2017 (30 May – 7 June). **Sinéad O'Neill**, whose *Uprising* won an Ivors Classical Award in 2025 and has been nominated for a RPS award, directs the brand-new production. Star mezzo-soprano **Beth Taylor** makes her role debut as Orlando – a casting choice that, in departing from the more traditional countertenor, shows Longborough's willingness to rethink the drama. *Orlando* will be performed by renowned period-instrument ensemble the **Academy of Ancient Music** making its LFO debut, conducted by **Christopher Moulds**. Celebrated soprano **Anna Devin** makes her role debut as Angelica, with eminent bass-baritone **Andrew Foster-Williams** singing Zoroastro and rising star **Katie Bray** in the role of Medoro.

The first ever LFO production of Verdi's *Macbeth* is directed by European Opera Award-winner **Karolina Sofulak** (1 – 16 July). **Nil Venditti**, who has had considerable impact as an orchestral conductor in recent years – including a 2025 debut at the BBC Proms - makes her UK operatic debut in the pit. Baritone **Mark Stone**, who sang Alberich in Longborough's 2024 *Ring Cycle*, returns to Longborough to sing the title role. Ukrainian soprano **Viktoriia Balan** makes her LFO debut in the role of Lady Macbeth. The production is designed by the award-winning **Kimie Nakano** who is also behind Longborough's *Tristan*, revived this year. Additionally, the production features the **Longborough Festival Chorus** and the **Longborough Community Chorus**.

Humperdinck's operatic setting of the immortal Grimm brothers' tale, *Hansel and Gretel*, is conducted by Grammy Award-winner and International Opera Award-nominee, **Karen Kamensek** (30 July – 8 August). **Lucy Bailey** directs a cast which includes established singers **Darren Jeffery** and **Lee Bisset** in the 'adult' roles of Father and Mother / Witch. Longborough Festival Opera's 2026 Emerging Artists **Joanna Harries** and soprano **Rosalind Dobson** take up the title roles, alongside the acclaimed **Longborough Youth Chorus**.

In 2017, Longborough Festival Opera's new production of *Tristan und Isolde* drew critical acclaim and further cemented LFO's reputation as the UK home of Wagnerian drama. Longborough Music Director, **Anthony Negus**, conducts a revival of that production this summer, directed by **Carmen Jakobi** (20 June – 18 July). Anthony has recently won the Australian Chaser Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Conductor of 2025 for Melbourne Opera's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. *Tristan* and *Macbeth* share a designer in **Kimie Nakano** who has won admiration for her ambitious and imaginative productions. As with every Wagner opera at Longborough, *Tristan* features a top cast of British and British-trained Wagnerians including tenor **Peter Wedd** as Tristan and soprano **Catharine Woodward** in her role debut as Isolde. The celebrated mezzo-soprano, **Catherine Carby**, returns to Longborough as Brangäne.

Emily Gottlieb, Executive Director of Longborough Festival Opera, said: "*What excites me most is the extraordinary level of artistry we're able to bring to this special corner of the Cotswolds. Longborough is a place where artists and creators feel supported to take risks, and where audiences can encounter opera at its most vivid and imaginative. This season reflects everything we stand for: ambition, intimacy, and a deep belief in the power of live performance.*"

Polly Graham, Artistic Director, said: "What drives me each season is the thrill of curating brilliant creative teams and performers to create a stimulating and rich programme of work. Our setting invites boldness, and our artists rise to that challenge with extraordinary imagination. This year's programme brings together works that ask big questions, reveal unexpected beauty, and celebrate the power of storytelling - all in the intimate, electric environment that makes Longborough unlike anywhere else."

Booking for members opens on 16 February.

General booking opens on 2 March.

For more information, please visit: <https://lfo.org.uk/>

Images available [here](#).

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Listings information

<https://lfo.org.uk/whats-on>

Handel: Orlando | 30 May – 7 June

Academy of Ancient Music

Christopher Moulds *conductor*

Beth Taylor *Orlando*

Anna Devin *Angelica*

Katie Bray *Medoro*

Kelli-Ann Masterson *Dorinda*

Andrew Foster-Williams *Zoroastro*

Saturday 30 May | 16:00

Tuesday 2 June | 16:00

Thursday 4 June | 16:00

Saturday 6 June | 16:00

Sunday 7 June | 16:00

Wagner: Tristan und Isolde | 20 June – 18 July

Longborough Festival Orchestra

Anthony Negus *conductor*

Peter Wedd *Tristan*

Catharine Woodward *Isolde*

Catherine Carby *Brangäne*

Alastair Miles *Marke*
Robert Hayward *Kurwenal*
Brian Smith Walters *Melot*

Saturday 20 June | 15:00
Thursday 2 July | 15:00
Sunday 5 July | 15:00
Thursday 9 July | 15:00
Sunday 12 July | 15:00
Saturday 18 July | 15:00

Verdi: *Macbeth* | 1 – 16 July

Longborough Festival Chorus and Orchestra
Longborough Community Chorus
Nil Venditti *conductor*
Mark Stone *Macbeth*
Viktoriiia Balan *Lady Macbeth*
Jung Soo Yun *Macduff*
John Molloy *Banquo*

Wednesday 1 July | 17:00
Saturday 4 July | 17:00
Tuesday 7 July | 17:00
Saturday 11 July | 17:00
Tuesday 14 July | 17:00
Thursday 16 July | 17:00

Humperdinck: *Hansel and Gretel* | 30 July – 8 August

Longborough Youth Chorus
Joanna Harries *Hansel*
Rosalind Dobson *Gretel*
Darren Jeffery *Father*
Lee Bisset *Witch / Mother*
Kelli-Ann Masterson *Dew Fairy*

Thursday 30 July | 17:00
Saturday 1 August | 17:00
Sunday 2 August | 17:00
Tuesday 4 August | 17:00
Thursday 6 August | 17:00
Saturday 8 August | 17:00

About Longborough Festival Opera

Martin and Lizzie Graham started promoting opera in the grounds of their home in 1991 as Banks Fee Opera. Longborough Festival Opera has since grown into an established opera company, situated in the heart of the Cotswolds, with an annual season taking place in a purpose-built opera house seating 500.

The company is an independent charity that continues Martin Graham's legacy in the theatre he built in the grounds of the family home. It is not in receipt of public grant funding nor any revenue from the Graham family and relies on ticket sales and the generosity of members and audiences.

Throughout Longborough's history, Martin and Lizzie achieved what some might have said to be impossible: in 2013 they presented a full-length production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* with minimal budgets but to great critical acclaim, establishing the Festival as a destination for Wagnerians in the UK and abroad. In 2019 the company embarked on a new *Ring*, culminating in another new full cycle in 2024.

Since the 1990s, LFO has presented high-quality opera overlooking the beautiful Evenlode valley in Gloucestershire in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Conscious of its surrounding environment, the Festival is committed to sustainability and creative reuse with a tradition of repurposing, reclaiming and recycling objects to create transformative architecture, artwork and performances.

Learning and Participation are central to the work of the company. LFO operates an Emerging Artist Programme offering solo roles and chorus positions in its world-class productions for singers at the beginning of their careers. Longborough's music staff also provide weekly singing lessons in its Singing Schools, with a new scholarship introduced in 2025 to offer recipients the opportunity to perform in the LFO Youth Chorus in a production in the summer festival. Another schools scheme – Playground Opera – reimagines classic operas to make them accessible for children. Workshops with local secondary schools also take place every year, involving interactive sessions with live performances and discussions.

<https://lfo.org.uk/>