

hikikomori!



A new chamber opera by Zygmund de Somogyi
Exploring isolation and healing
Monday 4th April, 3pm

Oborne

Hikikomori!

First performance, Monday 4th April 2022
Commissioned by Sue and Nigel Masters

Over the last decade Opera in Osborne, and latterly Cameratina, has built a reputation for welcoming highly talented directors and performers, so that they feel at home to experiment. At the same time the production crew has built up considerable expertise in creating great productions with very limited resources.

When you add a young composer looking for a venue to run through a first operatic work on a very unusual theme, then **hikikomori!** was an opportunity begging to happen.

While hikikomori! is clearly a piece for these singular disjointed times, the desire of musicians to create new work that challenges norms is universal. It would be great to think that, in years to come, more young composers, performers and artists see Osborne as a catalyst for bringing innovative and even outlandish creative projects to life.

In the meantime, our thanks go to Zygy himself, to Susanna for her insight and the brilliant ensemble she has created, to Anna Thorpe, with her wonderful dragons, and to all the production crew, especially Jon and Jenny, for making this idea happen.

Please do enjoy, and remember you saw it in Osborne first.

Nigel and Sue Masters
April 2022

Characters:

HIKIKOMORI (THE BOY) — Dreamer. Shy, aloof, and somewhat melancholic. A teenage schoolboy who, after experiencing a sudden trauma, has retreated into his own head, creating for himself the white room — a veil of safety. *Note: the character of THE BOY is not present on stage or within the performance.*

KEL — THE BOY's best friend from school. Outgoing, carefree, and optimistic. Clumsy and a bit of a prankster, often resulting in spats with AUBREY. Incredibly loyal to his friends — and should the time come, will always stand up for them.

AUBREY — THE BOY's childhood friend; the proverbial “girl next door”. Friendly and playful but hot-headed, often turning sour when things don't go her way. Both her and THE BOY claim they're just friends, but is there something more lurking beneath...?

HERO — KEL's older brother. Charismatic, intelligent, and down-to-earth; someone THE BOY looks up to and considers a role model of sorts. Usually tries to keep the peace between his younger brother and his friends, and isn't afraid to stand up for what's right.

MARI — THE BOY's older sister. Passionate, studious, and thoughtful; has an incredibly close relationship with her younger brother. Often found practicing her violin; she is currently preparing for auditions at a conservatoire.

THE NARRATOR — Our guide throughout this story. Deeply cares about the motivations of our BOY, and is as eager to help him recover as we are.

THE KEEPER — The guardian of the black room, and close confidant of THE NARRATOR. Has been tasked with guarding a terrible secret — and making sure that only the chosen may discover it...

The Story

ACT ONE: THE BOY IN THE WHITE ROOM

HIKIKOMORI, after experiencing something traumatic, has shut himself away in his own head. Creating a white room and a technicolour dream world, he becomes safe from the memories of his trauma, in the company of his three best friends.

HIKIKOMORI

synopsis

After the four of them struggle with making flower crowns, they have the idea to ask THE BOY's sister — MARI — for help. They race to their treehouse, where she is often found practicing violin. KEL races ahead of them, reaching the tree to find a hollow stump. However, as the others arrive, he sees something... horrific.

KEL breaks character and tries to tell THE BOY the truth, but he runs away — back to the safety of the white room. Back to denial.

ACT TWO: THE BOY IN THE BLACK ROOM

HIKIKOMORI, after calming himself down in the safety of his white room, returns to the dream world, greeted by HERO and AUBREY — but KEL is nowhere to be found, and MARI has, somehow, been gone for months.

The three set off on a grand adventure to find MARI — as THE BOY lets his imagination run wild — but at the bottom of his dreams, they are stopped outside a pitch-black door by THE KEEPER. As THE BOY's friends converse, THE KEEPER is begrudgingly convinced to let HERO through the black door.

On his return, having learned the truth, his tears and anguish turn to rage. He lashes out at THE BOY, telling him that if AUBREY knew what he knew, she would hate THE BOY as much as he hates himself. As he leaves them behind, the world falls apart around them. THE BOY is in the black room.

ACT THREE: THE BOY INSIDE HIS HEAD

HIKIKOMORI, holding the hand of his last partner, AUBREY, decides to head through the black door, ready to take on the truth. As he stares at the broken violin behind the door, his memories of the night of his sister's death come flooding back.

AUBREY, realising what has happened, desperately tries to bring THE BOY back to blissful denial. She fights with THE BOY's guardian angel — an apparition of his sister MARI — as THE BOY's mind confronts the trauma he has repressed all this time. Torn between the denial of the dream world and acceptance of the truth, THE BOY makes a decision: he kills AUBREY, his last demon now slain.

With the need for his dream world gone, THE NARRATOR can finally wake him up. THE BOY awakes in a hospital bed — is he now ready to accept his sister's death, work through his mental trauma, and move on with his life?

Extended notes

I first conceived of *hikikomori!*'s libretto in rural Germany in the winter of 2020-21, in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The story of *hikikomori!* is a semi-adaptation of indie psychological-horror video game OMORI: releasing in December 2020, the video game centres on a boy living in his own head, going on adventures with his childhood friends, while slowly (re)learning a hidden, horrifying truth — culminating in a climactic decision of whether OMORI can leave his dream world, or remain victim to his own denial.

During my first playthrough of OMORI, I couldn't help but notice the acute similarities between the titular boy, and the collective trauma many of us have experienced over the past two years. The effect of the pandemic on young people, in particular, has been dramatic: a survey conducted by The Guardian shows that 7% of seventeen-year-olds have attempted suicide ([source](#)), and a further 24% admitted to self-harm, in the year of the study. The collective trauma we have all experienced over the past two years is not simply a side effect of our staying at home: it is our fears of our own mortality, the loved ones who have been taken from us too soon, the constant headlines reminding us of the gravity of our situation.

This is particularly why this opera takes place almost entirely within the mind of the hikikomori boy, and why I have taken the decision to not portray him directly. The characters — while manifesting as his childhood friends, his older sister, a figure he looks up to — are nonetheless his own creations, archetypes filtered through the lens of the boy's imagination. The only exception to this is, perhaps, in our narrator, who guides our experience through each recess of the boy's mind: from the white room, through his technicolour dream world, to the denouement that awaits him on the other side. Or, perhaps, the narrator is also part of the boy's universe in her own way: a figure of his fragmented conscience, a guardian angel, the voice inside his head beckoning him to the light.

In essence, *hikikomori!* is an opera about isolation, about trauma, about grief, and about recovery. It has been an immense privilege to work with Nigel and Sue Masters, Susanna Stranders, Katy Thomson, Kieran Rayner, Iuno Connolly, Liam Bonthron, Michelle Santiago, and Opera in Osborne to bring this project to life, and I am eternally grateful for the opportunities they have been able to facilitate. From the bottom of my heart — thank you.

“Oyasumi, oyasumi, close your eyes and we'll leave this dream...”
~ Calum Bowen (bo en) — ‘My Time’ (OMORI)

Zygmund de Somogyi, Composer, March 2022

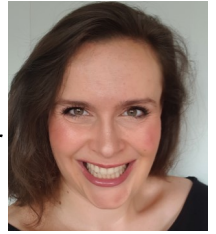
Notes
Extended

Cast & Dignitaries

KATY THOMSON

MARI / THE NARRATOR [mezzo soprano]

Katy is a Britten Pears Young Artist (2021-22) and a recent graduate of the Royal College of Music Opera Studio. She was a Garsington Opera Young Artist in 2021, notably stepping in for one performance, and making her debut, as the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. katythomson.co.uk



IÚNÓ CONNOLLY

AUBREY [soprano]

Soprano Iúnó Connolly has performed at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Ensemble - *A New Dark Age* - 2020), English National Opera (Chorus - 2020), Festival d'Aix-en-Provence & Heidelberger Frühling Festival, to name a few. She was a finalist in the International Haydn Singing Competition and the Nico Dostal International Singing Competition and is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

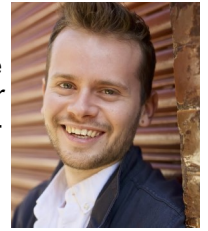
<https://www.iunoconnolly.com/>

LIAM BONTHRONE

KEL / THE KEEPER [tenor]

Liam is a Bicentenary Scholar at Royal Academy Opera, where he has sung Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* and Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is a Samling Artist and was an Alvarez Young Artist with Garsington Opera.

www.rayfieldallied.com/artists/liam-bonthrone



KIERAN RAYNER

HERO [baritone]

Kieran is a current Britten Pears Young Artist, 2021 International Handel Competition finalist and Royal College of Music Opera School graduate. He has performed solo at the Royal Albert Hall and Buckingham Palace, and across Britain, Europe, Asia and the Pacific Islands.

kieranrayner.com

MICHELLE SANTIAGO

piano

Canadian pianist Michelle Marie Santiago resides in London where she is a freelance pianist, répétiteur, vocal coach and piano teacher, as well as a staff accompanist at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. www.mmsantiago.com



Susanna Stranders

artistic director

British pianist, conductor and répétiteur Susanna has worked with opera companies throughout the world. She was head of music and chorus master for Garsington Opera and is now a member of the music staff at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

www.susannastranders.com

Thank you to the following, who each sponsored a performer:

Sue Masters

Liam Bonthrone

Nigel Silby

Michelle Santiago

Liz Padua
Katy Thomson

David Hughes

Iuno Connolly

Elaine Fairless

Kieran Rayner

Zygmund de Somogyi, Composer

Zygmund de Somogyi (b. 1996) is a British-Filipino composer, artist, performer, and curator currently working nationally and internationally from London. Zygmund's work explores online folklore, interdisciplinary performance, and the recontextualisation of genre and form, with their nonclassical background and punk rock upbringing greatly informing their practice as a composer.

Zygmund's compositions have been performed across the UK, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Malaysia, and Canada by ensembles such as Quatuor Bozzini, Fidelio Trio, Thallein Ensemble, and Tresonant; they have also written music for ThinkTank Planetarium, OSO Arts Centre, Camden Fringe Festival, and Chris Hadfield's Rare Earth.

Zygmund studied at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire with Ed Bennett, Joe Cutler, Edwin Roxburgh, and Howard Skempton. They are the founder of online magazine PRXLUES, giving young composers the opportunity to display their work on a public platform. Zygmund openly has Asperger's Syndrome, and runs an online network for autistic musicians and creatives.

Anna Thorpe, Illustrator

Anna grew up in Tokyo and has been involved in many art projects across the city. She started travelling in 2017 making her way across India, Korea, Mexico and Spain looking for inspiration and alternative ways of living.

She now lives in Somerset with her husband and young daughter. Anna's family name is Midoritera, which means Green Temple. This is something that Anna lives by, that nature is a temple and should be treated as such.

Anna says "Hikikomori is deeply embedded into the Japanese culture. With the opportunity to create your own world within yourself becoming increasingly easier to achieve, hikikomori is something we have all experienced around us. The dragons represent the inner dialogue going on inside of us, each dragon representing a choice... go deeper inside or face the reality of the outside world."

And special thanks to:

Revd David Bond for the use of St Cuthbert's, Pulse Roadshow for the lighting and projection equipment and Jan Coward for the use of his field.

The crew

Jenny Fletcher
lighting

Sarah
Lacey
projection

Sue Masters
ticketing

Jason Perryman
set construction

Nigel Masters
production

Siobhan Chapman
costumes

Jon Fletcher
technical



hikikomori

(ひきこもり or 引きこもり)

(lit. *pulling inward, being confined*)

noun

1. (in Japan) the abnormal avoidance of social contact, typically by adolescent males.
2. A person who avoids social contact.

Please note: this opera explores themes of anxiety, depression, trauma, and (implied) suicide.