



## [Into The Underworld](#)

at Royal Northern College Of Music

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) November 2017

RNCM Learning And Participation's Children's Opera Project is now in its tenth year, and provides a much needed and wonderful insight into the world of Music Theatre, enabling youngsters of Primary School age to collaborate in and perform their own devised new work.

There were four Primary Schools involved this year, and each had only three days of rehearsal. With the help of a few students from the RNCM itself, and composers **Kate Pearson** and **Dennis Tjiok**, the story, characters, lyrics, music and even the choreography were devised together as a collaborative process. Something that rarely, if ever, happens within the profession, but a hugely exciting and rewarding experience when it does!

The Musical lasted just over one hour and was performed through without interval, with four separate scenes. Four separate school groups performed the roles of the two main characters and their friends in each scene, with a very clever and seamless switch over each time; whilst members of the RNCM played the smaller adult roles and 9-person-strong vocal chorus.

Considering both the rehearsal time and the ages of the principal performers, this was actually excellently realised and prove to be a very enjoyable and easy to understand 'bluff your way in opera' guide to Orpheus In The Underworld, upon which today's presentation was based.

Basically, brother and sister, Orphée and Euri, are left by their parents to fend for themselves, and together with all the other poor and forgotten children they decide to go up into the world beyond and visit a shopping centre. Whilst there, disaster strikes and Euri is killed and taken to The Underworld. Unable to accept her loss, the sister decides to take the perilous journey into the Underworld to rescue him and try and bring him back to life. All the other children agree to help her and after consulting with a wise Snakeman, they travel into this underground realm of the half-dead, and are helped once again by the resident cook. They finally get to see Mr H himself, who reluctantly agrees to free Euri upon the condition no-one should ever look behind on their way out. Of course, Orphée does, and Euri is once again taken from her, and in one final attempt to bring him back out she appeals to her parents who simply say she can only see him for one brief moment and then he must go down below forever. In a very touching and emotive end, the brother and sister sing their last goodbyes.

With school children from Ribble Drive Primary School, Pike Fold Primary School, Alma Park Primary School, and St. Francis Primary School, this story was really brought to life with some 130+ children giving their all to this endeavour. The music, by **Kate Pearson** and **Dennis Tjiek**, was catchy and melodic, and although obviously geared for the children, still had some quite

difficult passages in it, making sure the majority was chorus singing with a few necessary and well rehearsed solo passages; and the more difficult chorus parts taken by the 9 RNCM singers. If all opera music was this jaunty then I would be at the Opera far more often!

The one thing I will mention which was both off-putting for audience and performers alike was the lack of curtain. The blackout at the end of the show was awkward and the children didn't know whether or not to stay on stage and the audience didn't feel comfortable leaving in this semi-finished state.

A massive well done to all involved here. Thoroughly enjoyable, and so wonderful to see so many youngsters gaining so much from this. The future of Music Theatre is being kept alive through projects such as this, and long may they continue!