

# Preview: Dani Howard on her first opera Robin Hood

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**The Opera Story will premiere 25-year-old composer Dani Howard's first full-length production, Robin Hood, on 27 February at London's CLF Art Café in the Bussey Building, Peckham. Offering a modern take on the traditional tale of the outlaw, Robin Hood addresses contemporary issues and the conflicting forces of capitalism and environmentalism. She speaks to us about her experience of writing her first opera and the story's relevance to today's society**

I was approached by 'The Opera Story' in March 2018 by the artistic director Hamish Mackay while they were beginning to look for a composer for their third production. I was absolutely thrilled to receive the email, though at this stage was unsure if I was being 'interviewed' or if I had 'got the job'! After our meeting he offered me the commission and we took it from there, starting with the search for the remainder of the create team.

The musical language I tried to develop throughout is the same as what I am trying to develop within all my music. This combines lyrical 'implied melodies' (as I like to call them), with often extreme rhythmic and textural changes in a semi-minimalistic (/post-minimalistic) way. There are certain moments in the opera that require particular dramatic effects, which were sometimes out of my comfort zone, and it is these moments in which the story must come first. It was exciting for me to explore these new sound worlds that I perhaps would not have otherwise conceived independently.

I did a lot of listening to vocal music and opera in the very early stages of receiving the commission. This gave me a host of ideas and inspiration. However I then intentionally stayed away from listening to too much opera during the writing process, as I didn't want to be swayed too much by new ideas once I had created the foundation of themes and concepts.

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I found working with the libretto extremely different, and absolutely fascinating. The text completely shaped the music that I wrote, and I found the subtle recurring themes very natural and intuitive, which of course was reflected in the music.

I had a number of discussions with the two librettists I worked with (Zoe Palmer and Rebecca Hurst), and they very beautifully incorporated very rhythmic elements into the libretto, which allowed for me to maintain my musical voice throughout the opera. The narrative very quickly began to form, and shape the structure of the work musically.

Robin Hood is an extremely relevant tale, which shows to be true through the number of adaptations we have seen throughout history. Through my research, I was surprised at quite how much art has been inspired by this tale, from poetry, to sculpture and art as well as of course film and theatre.

We really looked into three main political views – the traditionalist, environmentalist, and capitalist. These social constructs are ever-present in our world today, and although times have changed from the original myth, there is absolutely huge relevance for this story today.

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