

A Foreign Field, the opera

This full-length opera was composed by Eric Wetherell and the libretto written by Elizabeth Major. It will be directed by John Telfer and conducted by the composer. This is its first performance.

Adapted from the book *A Foreign Field* by Ben Macintyre, it tells the true story of a young soldier, Robert Digby, who, together with a small group of British soldiers, was trapped behind enemy lines near the border between France and Belgium at the outbreak of war in August 1914.

The soldiers took shelter in the small village of Villeret and were hidden, fed and clothed by French villagers. They tried to get back to their own troops but were forced back. They became part of village life, working in the fields, and Robert Digby fell in love with Claire Dessenne, a 19 year old village girl who subsequently became pregnant.

After their daughter, H el ene, was born, they were betrayed by someone in the village and the German administrator in Villeret became aware that British troops had been sheltered locally. He told the villagers that these men had to surrender to authority and become prisoners of war. He threatened to exact reprisals on the village if they did not give themselves up.

The men knew they had to give in.

They were arrested, tried as spies and executed by firing squad. Despite the promise that the villagers would remain safe, they were treated badly and the village was deliberately destroyed by the Germans, until not one wall was left standing

The opera focuses on the key characters and paints a picture of the poignant and tragic way in which war takes its toll of people, changing them in their fight for personal survival and altering their way of life.

In that way, it speaks for all wars, past and present.

“A Foreign Field”

an opera in three Acts by Eric Wetherell

22nd, 24th and 25th September 2010
The Redgrave Theatre, Clifton, Bristol
7.30pm

Box office: Tel: 0117 907 8079
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www.aforeignfieldopera.co.uk

Tickets £15, £12 (concessions)

Supporting
Bristol Urological Institute Prostate Cancer Appeal
and ABF The Soldiers' Charity



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Eric Wetherell is well-known nationally as a conductor, arranger and composer. A professional musician for more than 50 years, his background in opera (Royal Opera House Covent Garden and Welsh National Opera), together with his lifetime's experience in composition, seemed to lead logically to a fusion of the two.

Having seen a review in The Times of a book by Ben Macintyre, his interest was sparked and he bought a copy of "A Foreign Field". The story was magnetic. He could instantly see the emergence of a first class opera topic and he wrote a 12 page summary of the book, picking out the salient points of the story in dramatic terms. The story was reduced from 30 or 40 characters and several different locations, to a single set - a French farmhouse kitchen.

The next stage was to send the summary to the author of the book and hope that he would give permission for the project to begin. Having condensed the story considerably, it was more than gratifying to receive Ben Macintyre's positive message "you have preserved the spirit of the original. Good luck!"

The summary text was passed to the librettist, Elizabeth Major, and she began to piece together the libretto for what finally became a full-length opera in three acts.

For full details about the opera, its background and an education project with school students in Bristol and South Gloucestershire, visit www.aforeignfieldopera.co.uk

The production is supporting two charities:

£2 from each ticket sold for the performances on Wednesday 22nd and Friday 24th September will be donated to The Bristol Urological Institute Prostate Cancer Care Appeal. On Saturday 25th September £3 from each ticket sold will be donated to ABF The Soldiers' Charity.