

TROUSER GIRL

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ABOUT US

As Malta’s national theatre education programme, TOI TOI’s mission is to introduce people of all ages to the arts with a special brand of non-formal and engaging learning events. TOI TOI productions entertain, inform and educate our audiences, thereby enriching their cultural life, in addition to providing a platform for artists to excel in their talents.

TOI TOI is committed to the presentation of quality artistic productions, the creation of new audiences for music, drama and dance genres, and the provision of a principal platform for local and international artists. The legacy of the TOI TOI training programme can be seen not just in **Trouser Girl**, but also far and wide with alumni from both Teatru Manoel Youth Theatre and Youth Opera starring, directing and producing in major local productions.



TEATRU MANOEL



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff

CHARACTERS



LUKEY

A sensitive teenage boy



CHRIS

A brash teenage girl.
Lukey's girlfriend. Chris
is the secret identity of
the superhero Raybeam.



DANNY

A moody teenage boy.
Chris' best friend. Danny
is the secret identity of
the superhero Transformo.



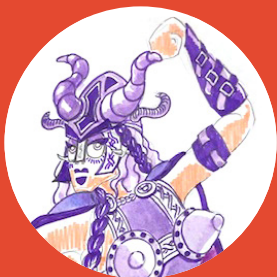
JANUSINA

A shape-shifting Roman
goddess who is in love with
Danny. Janusina also appears
in the guise of Darkangel.



DEVLINS

Mysterious creatures
who work for Janusina.



VIKING DEMON QUEEN

A larger-than-life
villain who rules over
the Realm of Ice
and Darkness.



TANG

A brave warrior
pretending to be a man.
She serves the Emperor in
the Kingdom of Dragons.



VIOLA

Pretending to be a
boy, she is the page of
the Marquis of March.

CONCEPT

The initial idea behind **Trouser Girl** was to create an introduction to opera for children and young people, specifically focusing on travesti or trouser roles. These are roles in which the character is understood to be a man, but is played by a woman. This is a technique that is certainly not confined to opera. The dame and principal boy in panto are popular examples of gender swapping, and it is also a feature of several Shakespearean plays, most notably Viola pretending to be a man in *Twelfth Night*.

From this starting point, we chose a number of well-known arias or songs, and passed the project over to writer Malcolm Galea. His contribution is the story encapsulated in the synopsis: a combination of a transdimensional superhero action adventure, a gender-fluid teenage rom-com, and some of the finest operatic music ever written.



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff

STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

A larger-than-life approach was adopted for the filming of **Trouser Girl**, drawing on a variety of techniques used in animated film. For the actors, this meant playing simple cartoon characters within two dimensions, rather than moving around and being highly physical as they would in the theatre.

To assist the actors, Isabel Warrington created costumes that not only recreated the style of animated action film, but also limited the actors' movement. Indeed, some of the costumes were plywood cut-outs with the actors standing behind them, unable to change position at all. The costumes were also enhanced by the stylised makeup designs of Karyn Schembri Grima.

The action was shot against a green screen, a technique used in many action films. The use of this allows for images to be dropped behind the actors in post-production. For **Trouser Girl**, we used cartoon drawings – also created by Isabel Warrington - to represent the different dimensions through which the characters travel.

Of course, fundamental to this entire film was the operatic music. To ensure that this matched the production style, we asked Veronique Vella to rearrange the pieces for small orchestra and to spice it up with some unexpected instruments. This is evident from the very start of the film. Listen out for the glockenspiel, piano glissandos and a generous dose of do-wap from the singers in the overture from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

All the music had been recorded separately prior to filming, in order to create a soundtrack against which the singers could lip-sync during the shooting. Under the expert supervision of Kor Malta's Riccardo Bianchi, the four singers and a group of musicians from the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra recorded all the music on the stage of the Manoel Theatre. After being mixed by Alec Massa, it was handed over to videographer Sam Chetcuti, who brought all the different parts of the creative process together in his edit suite to create the final product.

Altogether, the creation of the film has been an incredible process, involving the collaboration of a large number of musicians, theatre makers and film makers of the highest calibre. The end result is something that is not only new to Malta, but also new to the world of opera.



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff

ABOUT THE TEAM

MICHAEL

— Director

What was the biggest challenge when bringing this script to life and on camera?

The real challenges were ultimately thinking of a theatre show in terms of a film, and then devising all the characters as animated characters, even though they were still being played by real people.

How is this production bringing something new to young audiences in Malta?

The film is a really exciting way to be introduced to the music of opera, in a superhero format that young people will already be familiar with. Also, the animation style that we've used is something that has never been seen in Malta before.

If you could describe the show in one sentence, what would it be?

A teenage romcom packaged as a superhero action adventure, crammed full of some of the best operatic music ever written.



If the audience only took one message with them from the show, what would it be?

Don't be afraid to be who you are and to love who you are.

If you could be any superhero, who would you be?

We're all superheroes in our own way. That's why Lukey is such a loveable character in the film. I'm happy to be just who I am.

MALCOLM

— Writer

What would you like the audience to remember most after the show?

To regard their toilets with suspicion. You never know what can come out from there.

If you could describe the show using three words, what would they be?

Interdimensional, adventure, fun.

Describe the characters.

Superhero, crime-fighting, hormonal angsty teens.

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be?

Everything I touch turns to pizza!

What was the biggest difference between writing for the screen and for the stage?

The show is still written as a theatre piece. That way, it can be performed as such when theatres reopen. Screenplays would have far more scenes that would be shorter.



However, since I knew that it was going to be filmed, I didn't have to worry about giving the cast and crew enough time to change costumes and set in between scenes. That's always a headache.

VERONIQUE

— Musical Arrangement Composer

How would you describe the music and lyrics?

Timely, classic, witty, cheeky and fun!

Which is your favourite piece of music that features in the show?

Tell Her.

Do you think that singing opera on film is different to singing opera live in a theatre?

When you're presenting any theatrical piece that is meant for the stage, there's always going to be a certain added thrill when performing it to a live audience. This excitement is of course bouncing back and forth to and from those who are watching. However, when **Trouser Girl** was recorded, everyone involved made sure to add that extra zing to their creations and performances, so that the audience watching at home would still feel like they're present in the theatre with all these wonderfully colourful characters.

Which song do you think is the most memorable in the show?

Kissing Song.



RICCARDO

— Musical Director

How would you describe the music and lyrics?

One word is enough: Original... but in its double meaning, both in the sense of being authentic and unique, but also in the sense of being tied to its origins, because in this show, we talk about humanity, showing what is hidden, and teaching to look beyond appearances. Indeed, this is the very essence of theatre.

Who is your favourite composer whose music features in this show?

Mozart, for sure! I think he would have absolutely loved this project!

Without giving anything away, which verses would you pick from the show?

"I guess everyone changes in some way. What kind of person would want to stay the same all their lives?"

"But what if you start losing sight of who you are?"

"Then hopefully those that love you will be able to remind you. Like some kind of... anchor..."



If there was one thing you wanted audiences to learn about opera from this production, what would it be?

That music is a great special effect capable of making you see the invisible, and of saying the unspeakable.

ISABEL

— Designer

Was it more challenging designing and creating costumes for film rather than for theatre?

I think it was a little easier creating costumes for film, because there wasn't any need to worry about quick changes or transformations. But although this made things easier, I got to experiment with a different concept to what I am accustomed to. Using cut-outs as costumes for certain characters was a welcome and interesting change for me. I was also very pleased with the wigs I made from foam, as they captured the cartoon element really well.

What inspired the designs of these costumes?

The entire piece was designed in the style of a cartoon and pop art. That's the reason why they're all so stylised, including characters such as Lukey, Chris, Danny and Janusina who were the real people in the story. The superheroes were even more stylised, as can be seen from their makeup.



How would you describe the style of the characters?

Our aim was to bring cartoon characters to life, and I think we succeeded.

If you could wear any of the costumes you designed for this production, which would it be?

Raybeam's. I never knew how much I wanted to be a superhero till I saw the finished costume.

The design and colours in the production are quite distinctive. If you could describe what emotions each of these colours represent, which would they be?

Yellow for Lukey/Trouser Girl - He was a naïve, happy and lovable character, like a ray of sunshine. It was also a good colour to start the first scene with, because it's bright and engaging and takes you right into the story.

Red/Fuchsia for Chris/Raybeam - These colours really suited her since she is full of energy and vitality. The two colours are both warm and vibrant, and I think they complemented the characters they were assigned to.

Blue/Turquoise for Danny/Transformo/Girl - Danny was the cool dude in the story, so we needed to create a contrast with Lukey, so we gave him cooler colours.

White and gold for Janusina - Colours that are befitting to a goddess.

Purple for Viking Demon Queen - The colour is associated with royalty, power and ambition, so they couldn't be more relevant to this character.

Violet/Orange for Viola - A bit of a cliché, but hey, it's a cartoon.

Red and black for Dark Angel and Devlins - The two colours are traditionally associated with demons. I added some flames to their masks for effect.

TROUSER ROLES IN OPERA

Trouser roles in opera are those in which a male character is played by a female singer. The character is usually a young boy or teenager, who may or may not be the hero of the story. The roles are also sometimes known as **Breeches roles**. Breeches were a kind of trousers that went all the way from the waist down to the ankles.

As these are younger characters, they will have more boyish traits than the other male characters, and their voices will be higher-pitched. In order to portray this, the composer would have written the music to be sung in a higher vocal range, with notes that can usually only be reached by women. The women with the highest range are sopranos, and those with the lowest are contraltos. In between are the mezzo-soprano; most of the trouser roles are written for women with this vocal range.

Other trouser roles exist almost by accident. In the early 1600s, when opera had begun to emerge, women were not allowed to be on stage. During this period, some roles, both male and female, were played by castrati - young men with high voices. To become a good castrato required a lot of training, and this would initially involve horrific surgery. Luckily, the practice was later banned, but since the music was written for higher vocal ranges, women began to fill the void that men had left. In other words, women started playing these roles by accident. Despite this, the operatic story and the audience acknowledge that the character is male, even if the person playing the character isn't.

There are several famous operas that feature trouser roles. One of these is *Humperdinck's Hänsel und Gretel (Hansel and Gretel)*, which follows the fairytale of the same name. Hansel is the hero of the story. He is a young and courageous child who wants to protect his sister at all costs. His youth and innocence is reflected in the higher vocal range required for the role.



Still from *Hansel and Gretel*



Similarly, Cherubino, a teenage character in Mozart's opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), is a character known for his youth and innocence. He has a carefree attitude and all he wants from life is someone to love and someone to love him. In his most well known aria, *Non son piu cosa son*, he sings about the love of his life and does so with a lot of feminine passion.

Still from *The Marriage of Figaro*



Another example of the famous trouser role is Cupid's character in Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. As he is a representation of love, Cupid in the modern day is seen as being very light on his feet, romantic, and is considered to be quite feminine.

Still from *Orpheus in the Underworld*

There is also Prince Orlofsky in the opera *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Straus Junior. Orlofsky hosts a ball at which he explains his philosophy behind throwing a great party: '*Chacun a son gout*', or '*To Each, His Own!*'

Operatic trouser roles are still very popular, which is why the idea had sparked the basis for **Trouser Girl**. In fact, songs sung by Hansel, Cherubino, Cupid and Orlofsky all appear in the film, but with very different lyrics!



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

BUILD YOUR OWN SUPERHERO!

1

Draw two big figures on the board, one on either side. One of these will represent the superhero, and the second will represent the human character. When drawing the figures, discuss the physical characteristics and then include them, ex. tall, short, skinny etc.

2

Once you've drawn them, give them an everyday name and a superhero name.

3

Next, include a design for their everyday clothes and superhero outfit respectively.

4

Once you've designed their clothes and have given the superhero their emblem, decide on the colours altogether.

5

Following Step 4, decide on the emotional attributes of each character. Ex: Brave, shy etc. For the superhero side to their character, write down their superpowers.

CHECK THE INSTRUMENT!

Over the course of the opera, which instruments did you hear?



■ Piano



■ French Horn



■ Clarinet



■ Percussion



■ Cello



■ Saxophone



■ Violin



■ Double Bass



■ Bassoon



■ Viola



■ Flute

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (cont.)

WRITE YOUR OWN SONG!

After enjoying our performance of **Trouser Girl**, why not try and write your own song to one of the backing tracks which we have provided? You've created your own characters, so isn't it time to sing a song about them?

Write the lyrics about your own characters accompanied by the awesome musicians from the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra with our super fun recording from the show!



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff



Photo by Elisa Von Brockdorff

GLOSSARY

Animation

The technique of photographing successive drawings or positions of puppets or models to create an illusion of movement when the film is shown as a sequence.

Aria

A song sung by one person conveying feeling rather than fact; a generic Italian word for featured solos in opera; (pronounced ARE-ee-ah).

Baritone

A male voice category for lower (but not the lowest) notes. Lukey in **Trouser Girl** is a baritone.

Bassoon

The bassoon is a woodwind instrument in the double reed family that mainly plays music written for middle to lower pitched sounds. Judith LeClair is a famous bassoon player or bassoonist.

Cello

The cello or violoncello is a bowed string instrument of the violin family. Music for the cello is generally written in the bass clef. Sheku Kanneh-Mason is a famous cello player or cellist.

Cinematography

The art of photography and camerawork in film making.

Clarinet

The clarinet is a family of woodwind instruments. Benny Goodman was a famous clarinet player or clarinetist.

Close-up

A close-up in film-making is a type of shot that tightly frames a person or object.

Composer

A person who writes music, especially as a professional occupation.

Contralto

The lowest female singing voice.

Costume Design

Costume design is the creation of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or performer.

Director

A person who supervises the actors and other staff in a film, play, or similar production.

Double-Bass

The largest and lowest-pitched bowed string instrument. Esperanza Spalding is a famous double-bass player or bassist.

Flute

The flute is a family of musical instruments in the woodwind group. The artist Lizzo is a famous flute player or flautist.

French Horn

The French horn is a brass instrument made of tubing wrapped into a coil with a flared bell. Sarah Willis is a famous French horn player.

Genre

A style or category of art, music, or literature.

Green screen

A green background in front of which moving subjects are filmed and which allows a separately filmed background to be added to the final image.

GLOSSARY (cont.)

Lyrics

Words which are usually written to music in the form of a song with a verse and chorus.

Mezzo-Soprano

A female singer with a voice pitched between soprano and contralto. Chris/ Raybeam in **Trouser Girl** is a mezzo-soprano.

Opera

A play which is sung; a drama with costumes and scenery in which all or most of the text is sung to the accompaniment of an orchestra.

Orchestra

A group of musicians accompanying the entire opera and occasionally playing purely instrumental sections, like the overture.

Overture

An orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera. The **Trouser Girl** Overture is a mix between two composers, Mozart and Veronique Vella, so it has the cheeky title, *A Mozarella Overture!*

Percussion

A percussion instrument is a musical instrument that is sounded by being struck or scraped by a beater. A drum kit is part of the percussion family of instruments.

Piano

A piano is a large musical instrument that you play by pressing black and white keys on a keyboard. It is part of the percussion and string family of instruments.

Saxophone

The saxophone is a family of woodwind instruments usually made of brass and played with a single-reed mouthpiece. Courtney Pine is a famous saxophone player or saxophonist.

Screenplay

The script of a film, including acting instructions and scene directions.

Soprano

The highest singing voice. For example, Janusina and Danny sing soprano in **Trouser Girl**.

Storyboard

A sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue, representing the shots planned for a film.

Viola

A wooden stringed instrument, it is slightly larger than a violin and has a lower and deeper sound.

Violin

A wooden stringed instrument, the smallest and thus highest-pitched instrument in the string family.

