





# THE CUMNOR AFFAIR

## An Elizabethan Murder Mystery

Words: Iain Pears · Music: Philip Cashian

On 8th September 1560, Amy Robsart was found dead at the bottom of the stairs at Cumnor Place. She was left at Cumnor with only servants for company by her husband, Lord Robert Dudley, while he cavorted with Queen Elizabeth the First.

- I** *Cumnor Place, near Oxford, late afternoon.*
- II** *Same, shortly afterwards.*
- III** *Walsingham's office, Whitehall Palace.*
- IV** *Cumnor Place, two weeks later.*
- V** *Same, half an hour later.*
- VI** *Same, much later that evening.*
- VII** *Cecil's Office, Whitehall Palace.*

The performance will last approximately 80 minutes, with no interval.



## The Company

Cast:  
Elizabeth I Sibylla Meienberg  
Toby Damian Thantrey  
Catherine Phyllis Cannan  
Amy Robsart Amy Carson  
*now Lady Robert Dudley*  
Lord Robert Dudley Andrew Rees  
Walsingham Roderick Earle  
Cecil Robert Gildon

APOLOGY: We're very sorry that the casting was incorrectly listed on our flier: the roles of Walsingham and Cecil are indeed played by Roderick Earle and Robert Gildon respectively – huge apologies to them.

Musical Director Tim Murray

Ensemble Chroma  
Artistic Director/Clarinet Stuart King  
Violin Marcus Barcham-Stevens  
Horn Evgeny Chebykin  
Cello Clare O'Connell  
Bass Beverley Jones  
Flute Sarah O'Flynn  
Percussion Julian Warburton  
Chroma Manager Claire Shovelton

Director Bill Bankes-Jones  
Designer Tim Meacock  
Lighting Mark Doubleday  
Movement Quinny Sacks  
Consultant Sarah Playfair  
Répétiteur JP Gandy  
Production Manager Marius Rønning  
Stage Manager Jenny O'Connell  
Assistant Stage Manager Rebecca Norbury  
Costume Supervisor Caroline Hughes

Make-Up Raphaela Zanonato  
Assistant Director Olly Platt  
Scenic Painter Raj Westerberg  
Set Builders Factory Settings

We would like to extend our warmest thanks for their help with this production to: Bob Boas, Harriet Capaldi, Mel Cooper, Everyone at Riverside Studios, Alice Hogge Stefi Huter & the Royal Opera House, Nottingham Playhouse, Janine Mitchell, Sir Bryan Nicholson, Bridget O'Brien Twohig, Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Quinny Sacks, Pete Stapleton & the Union Chapel, John Studzinski, Robin Newton, Anna Winslet, Ed Hogarth, Chroma, and Sarah Playfair.

Administrator Anna Gregg  
Marketing Nikki Shepperd  
PR SoundUK  
Print & Publicity Design Jeremy at JAED

Chair David Leeming  
Deputy Chair Matthew Hart  
Company Secretary Caroline Steane  
Directors Jane Plumtre, Kenneth Richardson, Andrew Rodgers  
Member Philip Holt

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## The Cumnor Affair

It's a very great pleasure to welcome you all to Tête à Tête's 10th anniversary production, *The Cumnor Affair*, a new take on the terrible story of Amy Robsart's lonely and mysterious death at the dawn of the Elizabethan age.

This project began with an introduction from conductor Robin Newton, which led to a brief workshop presentation of the idea at our 2007 Festival, where Chroma played some of Phil's music, actors read some of the libretto and everyone agreed we would like to see more.

It has been the most moving, intriguing and stimulating experience peeling back the onion skins of history to give this often-retold story a new life. An amazing number of people have come together to throw themselves into the preparation and rehearsals for this production, as you see opposite.

With no public funding, it is a real tribute to the trusts, foundations and the many treasured individual supporters who have financed *The Cumnor Affair* that this great enterprise has been possible at all. Special mention should be made of the Genesis Foundation, whose visionary support has been Tête à Tête's lifeline over the last two difficult years, while particular thanks are also due for their very generous last-minute responsiveness to Vernon & Hazel Ellis, Peter Verstage and an anonymous donor.

We very much hope you all enjoy the result.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bill Bankes-Jones'.

Bill Bankes-Jones  
Artistic Director



**The “Darnley Portrait” of Elizabeth I c 1575.**

*Probably painted from life, this portrait is the source of the face pattern called “The Mask of Youth” which would be used for authorised portraits of Elizabeth for decades to come. The National Portrait Gallery, London.*

Queen Elizabeth I, 1533-1603, was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth came to the throne on the death of her half-sister, Mary I, after a dramatic childhood and youth involving various imprisonments and house arrests. After a very turbulent beginning to her reign involving a further switch from Catholicism to Protestantism and challenges for the throne from Mary Queen of Scots, her long rule was characterised by comparative peace and prosperity, a great increase in foreign trade and exploration, and a flourishing literary culture. Despite receiving many proposals of marriage, Elizabeth remained single and became legendary as the 'virgin queen'. She had many favourites, but none more important than Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.



**Sibylla Meienberg - Elizabeth I**

Sibylla Meienberg trained at East 15 Acting School and has worked for various theatre companies across Europe and London. She was delighted to perform in *Electra* at the Tête à Tête Opera Festival 2008.



**Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. 1560-65 Attr: Steven van der Meulen.**  
*The Wallace Collection, London.*

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1532?-1588, was the favourite of Elizabeth I. The fifth son of the Duke of Northumberland, Dudley knew Elizabeth from the age of eight and was imprisoned at the same time as her in the Tower. He married Amy Robsart, daughter of a wealthy Norfolk landowner in the presence of Edward VI on 4th June 1550. On Elizabeth's accession in 1558, glamorous and athletic, he was appointed master of the Horse, and was made a Knight of the Garter the following year, Privy Councillor in 1562 and Earl of Leicester in 1564. He found himself, at court, amongst a new bourgeoisie forming the seeds of the civil service. Described by a contemporary as 'A light and greedy man', Leicester was Elizabeth I's only serious English suitor after her accession to the throne, and her favourite throughout his life.



**Andrew Rees - Dudley**

Welsh tenor Andrew Rees studied at the RNCM and the GSMD before joining the ENO as a young artist. He has performed in Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, Finland New Zealand and Sydney Opera House. Andrew makes his first French debut in Nantes early in 2009.

**Amy Robsart by William Frederick Yeames 1877**

*Nottingham City Museums and Galleries (Nottingham Castle)*

No known contemporary portrait of Amy Robsart (1532-1560) survives. The rumours and mythology surrounding her death were rife at the time. Via Ashmole's *Antiquities of Berkshire* (published posthumously from his notes in 1719) and Mickle's ballad *Cumnor Hall* (1784) her story captured imaginations worldwide when Sir Walter Scott used these as the source material for his novel *Kenilworth*, 1821. With a conspicuously Germanic Royal Family, the Victorians (and especially the royals) were both very anti-Tudor and yet besotted with anything both historical and English. The story of Amy, Dudley, and Elizabeth became one of the favourite images of the hugely popular Victorian historical painters.



**Amy Carson – Amy Robsart**



Amy Carson is studying at RAM with Beatrice Unsworth. Work includes; Branagh's *Magic Flute*, Garsington Opera, *Death in Venice* (Philharmonia) *Dido and Aeneas* (Northern Sinfonia) and being a banana for a smoothie company.

**William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley (1520-1598),  
by or after Arnold van Brounckhorst c1565.**

*National Portrait Gallery, London.*

Son of a minor courtier of Henry VIII and Lincolnshire landowner, Elizabeth's first appointment when she ascended the throne was to make Cecil her principal secretary of state; he became the youngest member of her council. Throughout his life, he was the Queen's most influential minister, tempering her actions with cautious but decisive advice. He was created Baron Burghley in 1571, and was Lord High Treasurer from 1572. The only serious rival to his influence came from Leicester, with whom he had an uneasy working relationship.



**Robert Gildon - Cecil**

Robert Gildon studied at Manhattan School of Music, Tanglewood and at Aspen. He has sung roles for Garsington, the Opera Group, D'Oyly Carte and with the London Symphony Orchestra. Upcoming engagements include covering in Gershwin's *Let 'em Eat Cake* for Opera North. He works with Joy Mammen.



**Sir Francis Walsingham by John de Critz, c.1587**

*National Portrait Gallery, London.*

“It is his dark, deepset eyes that immediately arrest your attention. Staring out of the painting, they seem hooded, thoughtful, even quizzical, as if they seek to peer directly into the viewer’s mind, mercilessly probing and exploring one’s most private thoughts and innermost emotions. The portrait of Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I’s principal Secretary of State is an uncompromising study of an equally uncompromising man. More than four centuries later, the authority and intense energy of his personality, captured by this stark dour likeness, remain wholly undiminished.

“That finely chiselled face with its prominent aquiline nose and receding hairline appears to us cold, cruel and calculating – suggesting a man not to be trifled with, the heavily starched white ruff beneath his neatly trimmed beard is the single gesture from this brooding, fanatical Protestant towards the glamorous chic of the Elizabethan court’s opulent and extravagant costume. The background of the picture is dark and mysterious, providing few clues or hints about the man or his life.... the enigmatic image of one of the great, powerful engines of state who drove, shaped, and above all, safeguarded the late-sixteenth-century English fledgling Protestant nation.”

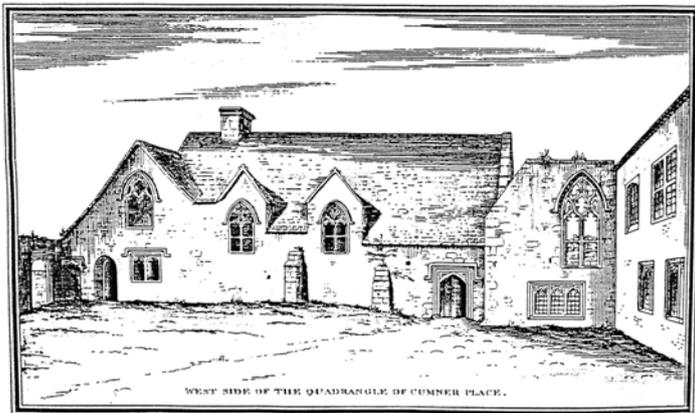
*Elizabeth’s Spymaster, Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England*  
by Robert Hutchinson

**Roderick Earle - Walsingham**



Roderick Earle has sung more than sixty roles as a principal with the Royal Opera. He has also appeared with all the major British opera companies and in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Israel, New Zealand and the Far East.

## Cumnor Place



*Engraving Cumnor Place, 1805 from Lyson: Magna Britannica.*

Cumnor Place was a relatively modest dwelling near Oxford, formerly a monastic property which went to the king's physician George Owen after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. In 1560 it belonged to the physician's son, William Owen, and was rented to Anthony Forster, chief controller of Robert Dudley's expenses and his friend, who as far as we know let Amy and her entourage stay there as his guests. On Sunday 8th September 1560, Lady Amy is said to have directed that the whole household should visit Abingdon fair. All that remains of the house now is a ruined fireplace in Cumnor churchyard.



### **Damian Thantrey – Toby**

Damian Thantrey has premiered over 40 works by new and established composers. Previously for Tête à Tête: Shorts, Six-Pack, Blind Date and Flying Fox.

## Cumnor Place



Photo: Tim Meacock

The fireplace at Cumnor today (the last surviving trace of Cumnor Place).



### **Phyllis Cannan – Catherine**

Phyllis Cannan has performed diverse roles including Hecuba, the Kostelnička, Lady Billows, Santuzza, Senta and Tosca here and overseas before children intervened. Engagements with Tête à Tête postpone notions of retirement.



William Cecil presiding over the Court of Wards and Liveries. Unknown c.1560-1590

**Bill Bankes-Jones**

**Director**

Bill has directed operas and plays for over 20 years, working for all the major UK opera companies and many abroad. He has directed all Tête à Tête's productions to date.

**Marcus Barcham-Stevens**

**Violin**

Marcus is pleased to be playing again for Tête à Tête, especially since he was the only one NOT to knit something during the *Odysseus Unwound* tour, although his inner imp did come out in Norway and Shetland.

**Philip Cashian**

**Composer**

Philip's music has been performed and broadcast worldwide - recent performances have included the Ojai Festival (California), Musikmonat (Basle), the St.Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Esprit Orchestra (Toronto), Riga Sinfonietta, Aldeburgh Festival, Spitalfields Festival, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and the BBC Proms as well as performances in Germany, Spain, Austria, Hungary, Holland, Sweden and China. *The Cumnor Affair* is his first opera. Philip is currently Head of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

**Evgeny Chebykin**

**Hom**

Evgeny enjoys playing with Tête à Tête because he gets to dress up in silly

costumes and play an obscene amount of notes.

**Mark Doubleday**

**Lighting**

Mark has lit everything Tête à Tête has ever done apart from once when he decided to light a production at New York City Opera instead. Mark is busy at the moment planning a production of *Tannhäuser* at the Teatro Real in Madrid as well as Tête à Tête's next extravaganza.

**JP Gandy**

**Répétiteur**

John-Paul specialises in contemporary/experimental music and has regularly worked with Tête à Tête and companies such as Almeida Opera, Royal Opera House, BBC Singers, Opera North and Welsh National Opera.

**Anna Gregg**

**Administrator**

Anna has worked with The Farnham Maltings, Adonais Ballet Company, Pimlico Opera/Grange Park Opera, The Covent Garden Festival, The Big Picture Company and Early Opera Company.

**Caroline Hughes**

**Costume Supervisor**

Caroline has worked on many Tête à Tête productions. Recent projects include Snegurochka (Wexford Festival Opera) Pelleas et Mellisande (Opera Theatre Co. Dublin). Recipient of Best Costume Design Irish Times Theatre awards 2008.

**Beverley Jones****Double Bass**

Bev may work with some of the top orchestras but she is honoured and quietly thrilled to be extending her C for Phil's first opera.

**Stuart King****Clarinet**

Stuart has been Artistic Director of CHROMA since 1997 but is perhaps better known for his alter egos: variously "bare chest and braces bear" and the "urban gondolier" to name but two.

**Tim Meacock****Designer**

Tim has much experience of intimate theatre working at the Orange Tree. He also loves big stuff, leaving Cumnor's dark corners to add the final glittering touches to Nottingham Playhouse's *Aladdin*.

**Tim Murray****Musical Director**

Tim has conducted for Almeida Opera, ROH2, English Touring Opera, Young Vic and ENO Works. Other work includes Philharmonia Orchestra, BCMG (BBC Proms), BBC Singers, Psappha, National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and Aldeburgh Festival.

**Rebecca Norbury****Assistant Stage Manager**

Rebecca is currently studying at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts for a

Postgraduate Diploma in Stage Management. She is keen to get experience in many different types and genres of theatre.

**Clare O'Connell****Cello**

This is Clare's first complete Tête à Tête experience although she has been playing with CHROMA forever!

**Jenny O'Connell****Stage Manager**

Jenny has enjoyed working on a wide range of shows in the past and is now having fun being part of a Tête à Tête adventure for the first time.

**Sarah O'Flynn****Flute**

Sarah is something of an expert Blind Dater with Tête à Tête, and is back to play all three sizes of flute in *The Cumnor Affair*.

**Iain Pears****Librettist**

Iain is a novelist and historian, the author of *An Instance of the Fingerpost* (1997) *The Dream of Scipio* (2002) and *The Portrait* (2005). His next novel, *Stone's Fall*, will be published by Jonathan Cape next year. This is his first libretto.

**Olly Platt****Assistant Director**

Olly has recently graduated from the University of York, and to date his

operatic highlights have included the role of Assistant Director for Britten's Paul Bunyan, and Director for Bernstein's *West Side Story*.

**Sarah Playfair****Consultant**

Sarah is a freelance opera casting director - she has worked in film and television as well as on many new opera projects. [www.sarahplayfair.com](http://www.sarahplayfair.com)

**Marius Rønning****Production Manager**

Marius has worked on many Tête à Tête productions. Other companies include: Trestle (Mask), Royal College of Music, English Touring Opera, The Shout, Actors Touring Company, Soho Theatre Company, The Royal Court, and Hampstead Theatre. [www.mariusronning.co.uk](http://www.mariusronning.co.uk)

**Quinny Sacks****Movement**

Quinny is a long time friend of Tête à Tête. She has worked with ENO, Opera North, The Met New York and also works in theatre and film.

**Nikki Shepperd****Marketing**

Nikki has worked with BT and O2 in the UK, Europe and Asia. Arts clients include: Arts Council Scotland, DCSF, Centre for Young Musicians, Audiences London and Puppet Animation Scotland.

**Maija Handover (SoundUk) PR**

SoundUk is committed to promoting the very best new music through PR, live events, consultancy and artist representation. For more information visit [www.sounduk.net](http://www.sounduk.net)

**Claire Shovelton****Manager, Chroma**

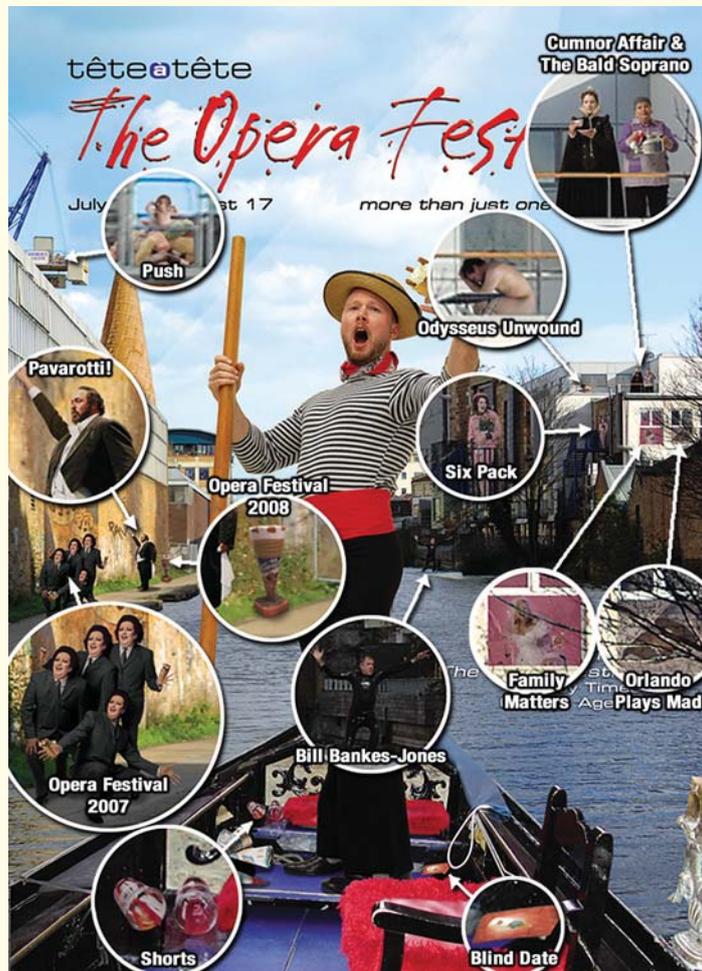
Claire loves looking after her CHROMATies, and also her job officially welcoming pretty much anybody of behalf of Tête à Tête... on her days off from these she makes words and numbers dance on her laptop.

**Julian Warburton****Percussion**

Tête à Tête, Tête à Tête, Tête à Tête, Tête, Tête, once again! Tête à Tête Tiddle Bum...

**Raphaella Zanconato****Make Up**

Raphaella graduated from Christine Blundell's Make Up Academy For Television and Film in September 2008. She is delighted to be working with Tête à Tête



## 10 Years of Good Nights Out

Since Tête à Tête's first production, *The Flying Fox* in 1998, we have proved time and again that our innovative approach to opera and productions of new operas can make a great night out for anyone.

Since then, we have employed over 400 artists to present the world premières of over 40 stage works by 35 different composers to many thousands of people from South Devon to Shetland and abroad.

Time and again, we receive wonderful feedback from our audiences, many of whom are new to opera, and usually around 20% of whom have never seen any opera at all:

*"I am not familiar with opera, but I loved the content. It surprised me by having poetry and grandeur I did not expect with modern music"*  
Audience feedback from *Blind Date*, 2007.

For the last two years, we have also hosted many other artists and company's at our annual opera festival, thus presenting over 50 more stage premières by over 500 artists, to a wonderfully growing audience.

*"Tête à Tête and its director Bill Bankes-Jones deserve a medal - or, more importantly, a regular slice of Arts Council funding. Dedicated to exploring operatic byways and novelties, with a focus on nurturing younger composers and librettists, this lean little outfit is bursting with good ideas, and manages to be playful and informal without being lazy or amateurish. For sheer inventiveness, it knocks the experimental projects fostered by the major companies into a cocked hat."*

Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph* 2007

For every £1 Tête à Tête has received in public subsidy over the last 10 years, we have managed to raise a further £3

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to the many private donors who have kept Tête à Tête thriving and made The Cumnor Affair possible; we *really* couldn't have done it without you:

Anonymous Donor	Peter & Margaret McManus
Mr & Mrs Roger Bankes-Jones	Ian & Frances Murray
Geoffrey & Fiona Barnett	Sir Bryan & Lady Nicholson
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Vernon & Hazel Ellis	Quinny Sacks
Phil Fortey	Odette Siepmann
Peter Goff	Jenny Slack
Patrick & Louise Grattan	Caroline Steane
Adey Grummet	Peter Verstage
Felicity Guinness	
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Jane Manning OBE	
Christopher McCann	

## Your chance to buy into the future...

We aren't a commercial operation. Our focus is 100% on the quality, on artists, art and audiences, doing our very best to explore and build the future of opera with a wide-ranging public where all feel welcome. So we can't offer picnics in grand parks and oceans of champagne; but we can offer the chance to join our many treasured supporters as a true patron of the arts, a 21st century Medici, Esterhazy or Saatchi, with the vision to repay your own good fortune with an investment in the human spirit and the future of opera.

We utterly depend on such support, have done from the start, and do our very best at all our performances to welcome you and your friends into our family of fellow opera-lovers, dreamers, makers and shakers, and to show you our appreciation of your involvement.

Please contact:

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**Tête à Tête,**  
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## COMING SOON!!!

We are delighted to announce our programme for 2009, including:

### **The 3rd Tête à Tête: the Opera Festival**

27th July – 16th August 2009 · Riverside Studios

A third joyous hosting of a plethora of artists and companies presenting new works, works in progress and playful ticklings of the fringes of the art-form of opera, next year's festival looks to be even more packed than ever, check [www.tete-a-tete.org.uk](http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk) for details.

### **The UK Premiere of The Bald Soprano**

Autumn 2009 · Riverside Studios

A co-production with the Genesis Foundation of the comic opera by Jean-Philippe Calvin, based on the landmark play by Eugène Ionesco.

Mrs Smith: Rachel Hynes  
Mr Smith: Damian Thantrey  
Mary, the Maid: Phyllis Cannan  
Mr Martin: tbc  
Mrs Martin: Louise Mott  
Fire Chief: Roderick Earle

Director: Bill Bankes-Jones  
Music Director: Tim Murray  
Orchestra: Chroma  
Design: Tim Meacock  
Lighting: Mark Doubleday

