‘WE ARE CONCERNED’: A PUBLIC READING OF THE WOLFENDEN REPORT

Sunday 11 June 2017, 4pm-late

A special reading of the 1957 Wolfenden Report that led to the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967

The Britten-Pears Foundation will be marking the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality with an event at The Pumphouse in Aldeburgh. It is part of the alternative Aldeburgh Festival in the unique setting of a former pumping station on the marshes.

‘We are Concerned’ will be a public reading of the sections dealing with homosexuality in the Wolfenden Report, a fascinating and historically significant document. Starting at 4pm, it will take approximately 5 hours and 15 minutes to complete.

The Report will be divided into 30 sections, marked by logical breaks in the Report itself. Matters covered in the Report include: ‘Is homosexuality a disease?’; ‘Blackmail and courts’ and ‘Oestrogen and Castration treatments’. It concludes with the recommendation that ‘homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence’ – although some members of Wolfenden’s Committee (who prepared the Report) submitted several lengthy ‘reservations’, which will also be included in the reading.

The Britten-Pears Foundation is delighted that human rights activist Peter Tatchell will be taking part along with other special guests, to be announced. The public will also be able to take part and can sign up now here: http://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080f45afaf2ca3f94-weare.

Lucy Walker, curator of Britten-Pears Foundation exhibition ‘Queer Talk: Homosexuality in Britten’s Britain’ says:

‘The Wolfenden Report in 1957 triggered a decade long campaign that led to the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. Along with the 50th anniversary of decriminalisation, we are marking the 60th anniversary of the Report’s publication. It is a remarkable and historic document. The Wolfenden Committee aimed to be objective about the ‘problem’ of homosexuality, but the Report clearly exposes their moral codes and beliefs which were very much of the time. Britten and Pears inhabited this time, place and culture, as well as the legal situation outlined in the Report, and had to maintain high levels of discretion in their private lives to avoid exposure. Both anniversaries give us the opportunity to reflect on the considerable progress towards equality for the LGBTQ community in the UK.’

General Director of the Foundation, Sarah Bardwell agrees saying:

‘Despite the social context of their relationship it is impossible to separate Britten and Pears when talking about their own achievements as they inspired and supported each other for nearly forty years. Much like our 2017 exhibition, Queer Talk, the public reading of the Report gives insight and understanding of the past so that we illuminate and improve the future.’

Roger Wright, Chief Executive of Snape Maltings says:
Snape Maltings is delighted to work with the Britten-Pears Foundation to include this event at The Pumphouse during the 70th Aldeburgh Festival. Our ‘alternative’ venue in Aldeburgh is the perfect space to host events like this and I hope that our Festival audiences - local and national - will come and support this special reading in the anniversary year.

Following the reading, from 9.30-10.30pm poet Richard Scott and artist Jez Dolan will present their 'Responses to the Report' with powerfully personal verse from Richard and a translation of the Wolfenden recommendations into Polari (the gay language used in the 1950s and 60s) and further responses from Jez.

During the first few days of the Aldeburgh Festival (9-25 June), Jez Dolan’s translation of the Wolfenden Report into Polari will be on display at The Red House, Aldeburgh. It will also be possible to see the Britten-Pears Foundation’s exhibition ‘Queer Talk: Homosexuality in Britten’s Britain’.

For further press information please contact Ella Roberts on 01728 451702, e.roberts@brittenpears.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

‘We are concerned’: a public reading of The Wolfenden Report
Date: Sunday 11 June, 4pm-late
Time: 4-9.15pm approx. for the reading, 9.30-10.30pm for ‘Responses to the Report’ with Richard Scott and Jez Dolan
Tickets: the reading is free, ‘Responses to the Report’ £12.50
Venue: The Pumphouse, 44 Park Road, Aldeburgh, Suffolk IP15 5EU
Sign up to participate: http://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080f45afaf2ca3f94-weare
Book tickets for ‘Responses to the Report’: https://thelittleboxoffice.com/brittenpears/book/event/62131 or call booking line 01728 451700

Queer Talk: Homosexuality in Britten’s Britain
The exhibition is on display at The Red House, Aldeburgh, home of the Britten-Pears Foundation.
The Red House, Aldeburgh opening times: Tuesday to Saturday, 1pm - 5pm (The downstairs of The Red House is open for free-flow viewing from 2.30pm (last entry 4.30pm) with guided tours that include the upstairs available at 2pm (book in advance) except during the Aldeburgh Music Festival); Aldeburgh Music Festival (Friday 9 - Sunday 25 June), open daily from 11am - 4pm (Please note that there will be no guided tours of The Red House during the festival).
Admission: Site admission: £5 (valid for one year), under 16s: free
Find us: The Red House, Aldeburgh, Golf Lane, Aldeburgh, Suffolk IP15 5PZ. From the A12, take the A1094 to Aldeburgh. At the roundabout past the supermarkets, take the first exit then follow the brown signs. Map reference: TM454578
Contact: enquiries@brittenpears.org, 01728 451700
Accessibility: The site is wheelchair accessible except for Britten’s Studio and the upstairs rooms of the House (360-degree virtual visits are available). Blue Badge parking is available and our minibus has space for one wheelchair.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
Benjamin Britten was one of the twentieth century’s great composers. He is particularly known for his operas, but also for choral works, and the many song cycles he wrote for his muse and partner, the tenor Peter Pears.

Born in Lowestoft in 1913, Britten grew up in a house that looked out across the North Sea that would inspire much of his music. It was an extremely musical household, and his mother especially encouraged his early attempts to compose. At 15 he began composition lessons with the composer Frank Bridge, who remained an influential mentor through Britten’s early career.

Britten quickly enjoyed success with early published works including such enduring favourites as the Simple Symphony and A Boy Was Born. However, it was the 1945 opera Peter Grimes which made his name, and that of Pears, who sang the title role. Peter Grimes was seen as raising English opera to heights not seen since Henry Purcell 250 years earlier and sealed Britten’s international reputation. Smaller, chamber operas swiftly followed, including The Rape of Lucretia in 1946 and the altogether more light-hearted Albert Herring, produced the following year by the English Opera Group (EOG) that Britten co-founded.

While on an EOG tour of European festivals in 1947, Pears suggested that they should start a festival of their own in the Suffolk seaside town where Britten had just bought a house. The first Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts was held a year later. In 1967 the Queen opened Snape Maltings Concert Hall as a larger venue for the growing festival, which continues to flourish to this day under the auspices of Aldeburgh Music.

In June 1976 Britten was given a life peerage, the first musician to be honoured in this way. He took the title Lord Britten of Aldeburgh. However, by this time Britten was suffering from a heart condition that an earlier operation had not fully cured. He died at The Red House, in Pears’ arms, in the early hours of 4 December 1976, twelve days after his sixty-third birthday.

Peter Pears (1910-1986)
Pears is considered to be one of the great singers of the twentieth century. Born in Farnham, Surrey, he was the youngest of Arthur and Jessie Pears’ seven children. His interest in music was established at Lancing College in Sussex and later he entered Keble College, Oxford, to study music in the autumn of 1928, but failed the first-year Pass Moderations exams.

Pears took vocal lessons on a part-time basis and enrolled full-time at the Royal College of Music in 1934, studying with Dawson Freer for what would prove to be only a two-term career as a student. He auditioned successfully for the BBC Singers and the New English Singers, launching his professional singing career.

In 1937 Pears met Benjamin Britten through Peter Burra, a mutual friend. From this developed one of the century’s most important musical partnerships. In the spring of 1939 Pears and Britten travelled to North America, initially for a few months, but stayed for over two years due to World War II. During this time their professional relationship grew into a personal one that would last the rest of their lives.
On their return to the UK Pears worked with Sadler’s Wells during the war years, appearing in a wide range of operatic roles. His breakthrough was the title character in Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, first performed at Sadler’s Wells in June 1945. Britten wrote other significant roles for Pears including the Male Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), the title role in *Albert Herring* (1947), Captain Vere in *Billy Budd* (1951), Essex in *Gloriana* (1953), Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), the Madwoman in *Curlew River* (1964) and Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* (1973).

Pears shared Britten’s belief in the importance of making music, art and literature widely accessible. He, along with Britten and Eric Crozier founded the Aldeburgh Festival in 1948 and as well as a regular performer, he was the festival’s artistic director for nearly forty years. Although he is best remembered as the principal interpreter of Britten’s music, Pears also championed the work of other composers, and formed significant working partnerships with musicians other than Britten.

Pears was an astute commentator and teacher of music whose insight into the workings of the voice was from a performer’s point of view. He taught at Dartington School from the 1950s and in the 1970s established, with Britten, the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Musical Studies (now the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme at Snape Maltings).

In May 1980 Pears opened The Red House as a public research facility and his love of art, literature and education paved the way for a significant legacy, much of which remains in evidence in the collections at The Red House.

**Britten-Pears Foundation**

The foundation exists to ensure that the legacy of Britten and Pears continues to be enjoyed worldwide. With a mission to reveal Britten’s genius, the foundation promotes his legacy, developing his vision and inspiring new audiences.

The Foundation is based at The Red House, the former home of Britten and Pears, in Aldeburgh, Suffolk. It is a registered charity formed in 1986 when the estates of Britten and Pears were reconstructed following the latter’s death. Its annual income largely derives from the royalties arising from worldwide performances and broadcasts of Britten’s works.

Address: The Red House, Golf Lane, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, IP15 5PZ
Website: [www.brittenpears.org](http://www.brittenpears.org)
Facebook and Twitter: @BrittenOfficial
Exhibition hashtag: #QueerTalk