

\*\*\*\*\***Press Release**\*\*\*\*\*

February 2012 – for immediate use

## **Plans unveiled for "computer opera" UK tour**

- **Composer Julian Wagstaff is planning a professional tour of his one-hour opera *The Turing Test* in the Alan Turing centenary year 2012**
- **The show was a sell-out success on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007, and features a singing computer as one of its characters**
- **The tour will be conducted by James Lowe, star of the Channel 4 series *Orchestra United***
- **The producers are seeking partners/sponsors to help make the 2012 tour of *The Turing Test* a reality. Details at [www.turingtestopera.com](http://www.turingtestopera.com).**

Scottish composer Julian Wagstaff has announced plans for a UK tour of his opera *The Turing Test* in October 2012, to coincide with the hundredth anniversary year of the birth of Alan Turing, legendary wartime codebreaker and pioneer of modern computing.

The opera is set in the near future and tells the fictional story of a brilliant young PhD student named Stephanie, who is trapped in a bitter battle between two rival scientists racing to build the world's first truly intelligent computer – a computer that can pass the famous Turing test.

The opera is one hour long, and is scored for six voices and a small orchestra. It is sung in English, with one of the six singers playing the part of the computer. *The Turing Test* was premièred by Edinburgh Studio Opera, the opera club of Edinburgh University, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2007. The production was a huge success, selling out every performance and gaining excellent reviews. It was cited by the novelist Alexander McCall Smith as a cultural highlight of 2007 in the *Daily Telegraph's* review of the year.

Julian Wagstaff said: "I am very excited about taking *The Turing Test* on tour. Alan Turing is a real hero of mine, and it will be wonderful to see a professional revival of my opera in this, his centenary year. I've got a great team working with me on the project, and I'm particularly thrilled that a conductor of such talent and renown as James Lowe has come on board for the current production."

The composer added: "Inevitably, a professional opera production requires considerable resources. The planned tour represents a great opportunity for commercial and non-commercial organisations within the technology sector and beyond to partner with us as sponsors. There will be a major media campaign to support the tour, and an educational strand which will engage with schools and colleges at the tour locations. We aim to bring the important concepts that Turing engaged with so brilliantly to a wider audience, while at the same time introducing new audiences to contemporary music and opera."

Organisations interested in sponsoring the tour can request a prospectus via the opera website at [www.turingtestopera.com](http://www.turingtestopera.com). Julian plans to present the opera in London, Cambridge, Manchester, Edinburgh and possibly other UK locations including Glasgow. Discussions are also ongoing about potential performances in Oslo and Berlin.

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## Notes to Editors:

*Show:* The Turing Test – a chamber opera by Julian Wagstaff

*Website:* [www.turingtestopera.com](http://www.turingtestopera.com)

*Venues:* Appropriate venues in London, Cambridge, Manchester, Edinburgh etc. TBC

*Dates:* October 2012, TBC

### ***Julian Wagstaff (composer/producer)***

Julian is a composer, writer and guitarist based in Edinburgh. He enjoys close connections with many of the country's leading musicians, and his works are widely performed throughout Scotland and beyond. His Piano Quintet appears on the album *Frontiers and Bridges* recorded by the Edinburgh Quartet and produced by Calum Malcolm, available on the Circular Records label. His stage musical *John Paul Jones*, on the life of the Scots-born hero of the American Revolution, was revived professionally as a concert version in 2010 with musicians from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Julian holds a PhD in musical composition from Edinburgh University, and recently served as Composer in Residence at Kings Buildings, University of Edinburgh. His latest commission was from the Royal Society of Chemistry for a trio to mark International Year of Chemistry 2011. Julian's compositions and arrangements have been performed by Scotland's top ensembles including the Edinburgh Quartet, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Consort of Voices and Hebrides Ensemble. He is published by Europa Edition.

More details can be found on Julian's website: [www.julianwagstaff.com](http://www.julianwagstaff.com)

### ***James Lowe (conductor)***

A prizewinner in international conducting competitions, James Lowe's work as Artistic Director of the Hallé Harmony Youth Orchestra was featured in a four-part documentary entitled *Orchestra United*, shown in the UK on Channel 4 in 2010. Lowe is Artistic Director of the New Bristol Sinfonia, Principal Conductor of the Edinburgh Contemporary Music Ensemble, Principal Guest Conductor of Music for Everyone, and held the position of Associate Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Educated at the University of Edinburgh, Lowe continued his development as Benjamin Zander Conducting Fellow with the Boston Philharmonic, and has studied with leading conductors in masterclasses, including Jorma Panula, Neeme Järvi, Bernard Haitink and with Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra. He will assist Haitink in performances of Mahler 9 with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam this May.

One of two prizewinners in the Tokyo International Competition for Conductors and special prize winner in the Jorma Panula International Competition, he has appeared in performance with the Osaka and Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestras, the Residentie Orkest Den Haag, the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, the St. Petersburg Academic Symphony Orchestra, the National Arts Centre Orchestra of Canada, the New Japan Philharmonic, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, Scottish Ballet, the orchestra of Welsh National Opera and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, as well as working with numerous other ensembles in many European countries, South Africa and the USA.

### ***David Williams (executive producer)***

David Williams is a creative producer, consultant and manager with some thirty years' experience in the cultural sector. David has worked in senior management with a variety of theatres and touring companies such as Cambridge Arts Theatre, Theatre Royal Stratford East, English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet and King's Theatre & Theatre Royal Glasgow. At Stratford East, David was general manager at the time that *Five Guys Named Moe* premiered and subsequently transferred to the West End.

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As a consultant, David has undertaken several investigations into companies, supporting them through change. For example, he recently worked with the board and chief executive of craftscotland through a period of organisational development. Together with his business partner David Evans, David Williams works with a variety of companies on a range of projects, from general and production management of touring theatre shows, to board, staff and venue development work. Recent projects have included assessing venues, staff and programming options in the UAE and working with the hip hop dance company Boy Blue Entertainment on their UK tour of the Olivier Award winning *Pied Piper*.

As a creative producer David invests a great deal of time looking for new projects to develop. With regard to *The Turing Test*, David is particularly interested in meeting potential co-producers and supporters.

### ***What is the Turing test?***

The Turing test is the popular name now given to what the English mathematician and cryptographer Alan Turing called the “imitation game”. In it, a computer tries to imitate a human being responding to typed questions via a computer keyboard. It was first expressed in a paper by Turing entitled “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”, published in 1950 in the journal *Mind*. To put it simply, Turing suggested that if you are having an “online chat” via two separate computer terminals, one of which is linked to a human correspondent and the other to a computerised chat program, and if you cannot tell the difference between the computer and the human after chatting for an extended period of time, then the computer has passed the test and can legitimately be said to be intelligent.

At the time of writing, no machine has ever succeeded in passing the Turing test. However, an annual competition called the Loebner Prize offers the sum of \$100,000 for the inventor of the first machine which can successfully pass it. The technological visionaries Mitch Kapor and Ray Kurzweil have an outstanding bet worth \$10,000 on whether or not the Turing test will be passed by 2029. A slightly modified version of the Turing test features in the cult sci-fi film *Blade Runner*, where Harrison Ford’s character Deckard attempts to unmask a robot by testing its responses to human questioning.

### ***Who was Alan Turing?***

Alan Turing (1912-1954) was one of the most important British mathematicians of the last hundred years. The founder of modern computer science, co-inventor of the computer and wartime Enigma codebreaker, his discoveries and insights have had a profound influence on the emergence of today’s computer-dependent age. Born in London, he studied mathematics at Cambridge University and, in 1936, published his groundbreaking and revolutionary paper “On Computable Numbers”, widely regarded as the first published article in the field of modern computer science.

During World War II, he worked at the government codebreaking station at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. As head of “Hut 8”, which dealt with naval cryptography, he was instrumental in devising the techniques which led to the cracking of the German Enigma codes, thus making a huge contribution to the Allied war effort, arguably shortening the duration of the war. After the defeat of fascism, Turing was involved in the design and construction of some of the world’s first electronic computers, including the Manchester Mark 1 machine at Manchester University.

A more or less openly gay man at a time when male homosexuality was a criminal offence, Turing was convicted of gross indecency in 1952 after admitting to a relationship with a younger man. Given the choice between imprisonment and state-administered hormone therapy he chose the latter, suffering horrible physical and mental side-effects as a result.

He committed suicide at the age of 42 by eating an apple laced with cyanide in an apparent reference to his favourite film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The Apple computer logo is said to be a coded tribute to Alan Turing's work.

*Contact:*

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*Internet Resources:*

[www.turingtestopera.com](http://www.turingtestopera.com) (official opera website)

[www.julianwagstaff.com](http://www.julianwagstaff.com) (the composer's official website)

[www.james-lowel.co.uk](http://www.james-lowel.co.uk) (the conductor's website)

[www.turingcentenary.eu](http://www.turingcentenary.eu) (website of the Alan Turing Centenary Year)

*Photographs:*

Photographs at various resolutions, together with other resources, may be downloaded from the composer's Press page at [www.julianwagstaff.com/press](http://www.julianwagstaff.com/press)

END OF NOTES TO EDITORS