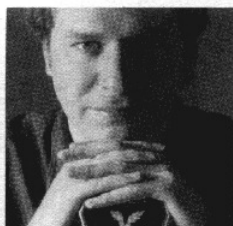


Q&A

Julian Wagstaff



The composer...

With one musical under his belt, 37 year-old composer Julian Wagstaff now has the distinction of writing and composing the only opera to be premiered in Edinburgh this August, *The Turing Test*

What did you want to be as a child?

A long-distance truck driver. Then I was going to be a journalist and write about East German affairs for British newspapers.

When did you decide you wanted to be a musician?

My dad used to take me to see the Royal Scottish National Orchestra when i was a kid – I think he took me to my first concert when I was five. I took up the violin because I wanted to be like my uncle.

Was there a point when you decided you wanted to be a professional writer of music?

After my musical, *John Paul Jones*, in 2001, I went to a conference in Glasgow marking the 25th anniversary of Shostakovich's death. This was my first contact with the classical world for several years and I was expecting to be treated as a bit of an interloper and ignoramus. But everybody assumed I was a music student, so that is what I became. It was the experience of the success of the musical, combined with being accepted on to the master's course that made me think, okay, I could probably do this for a living.

Why the Turing test?

I saw an exhibition about it in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology museum. It was one of those moments when something crystallises a whole load of ideas that had been going around my subconscious for a while. For many years I had been fascinated by the idea that bitter personal hatreds are often subsumed in academic rivalry. And I was also interested in languages and the work I had done as a computer programmer had led me to be interested in the way computers deal with language.

What actually is the Turing test?

If you are chatting to a computer via a keyboard and you can't tell whether it is a computer or a human, then it has passed the Turing test. It was proposed by Alan Turing, the English mathematician who was the father of modern computer science.

What does it feel like to have the only new opera opening in Edinburgh in August?

There is a degree of responsibility there, and there is also a degree of excitement. The responsibility is not to disappoint the expectations which will inevitably be brought to the theatre.

The Turing Test is at Augustine's from August 15-19