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Singing from the stands: Football fans to swap chants for arias in new opera

Supporters will feature and sing classical songs in a show that focuses on corruption within the beautiful game

By Craig Simpson

24 January 2022 • 6:21am

Opera inspired football fans through Pavarotti's rousing renditions of Nessun Dorma in Italia 90 - and now it's the turn of the terraces to inspire opera. A new English work will sport the world's first chorus composed of football fans, and supporters will be able to join

It's a World Cup opera ... starring 100 fans who already know the score

Show will celebrate the game's greats – with a chorus of real supporters. By Harriet Sherwood

In 1990, Nessun Dorma, the aria from Puccini's *Turandot*, sung by the Luciano Pavarotti, became the soundtrack to the World Cup in a marriage of high culture and the beautiful game.

That union is to be revived for the 2022 World Cup with a new opera celebrating the world's most popular sport and featuring a chorus of football fans who will undergo a crash course in operatic techniques.

Gods of the Game: A Football Opera will be staged at Grange Park Opera in Surrey in October, and broadcast soon afterwards on Sky Arts.

Directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah, the artistic director of the Young Vic, it tells the story of two childhood friends who become football stars. In the course of leading their country's bid to host a World Cup tournament, they encounter bribery and corruption.

The pair enlist the support of the "gods of the game" to ensure that righteousness prevails.

Phil Porter, the work's librettist, said: "The opera imagines a world in which the world's greatest ever footballers – from Pelé and Maradona through to Messi and Ronaldo – exist as gods, watching over the global game."

"The characters and events of the story are otherwise fictional, but very much inspired by the drama of international football. Famous on-field shenanigans like Maradona's 'hand of God', Zidane's extra-time head-butt, and Luis Suárez's fondness for biting

opposing players were rich sources of inspiration. And though our characters are invented, we have inevitably drawn from the many great characters that have played football at the top level – hardmen like Roy Keane and Stefan Effenberg, flawed geniuses from George Best to Maradona, modern icons like Megan Rapinoe and the famously self-assured Zlatan Ibrahimović."

More than 100 football fans will be recruited for the "footy fan chorus". After intensive training, they will be filmed performing a specially composed chorus at a UK stadium. The footage will be projected as part of the opera.

Wasfi Kani, the chief executive of Grange Park Opera, said: "There are various footballing fraternities for whom singing is an essential part of their fandom. We're switched into those, and we'll find a particular bunch and then expand."

Kani said she was not a football fan

'Opera. Football. A marriage made in heaven. Both full of passion, drama and charismatic stars'

Kwame Kwei-Armah

LEFT
Passionate fans at an Arsenal-Spurs derby.
Below: Kwame Kwei-Armah.
Tom Jenkins, Alicia Canter



and had "no interest in any sport at all". But with her second company, Pimlico Opera, she had worked with prisoners on productions of operas and musicals inside jails but open to the public. "Training nonprofessionals is quite doable, human beings are very creative creatures," she said.

Matching a game of football, the opera will last for 90 minutes. It will be sung in English and include snatches of famous arias amid original music by a team of five composers.

Kwei-Armah said he was incredibly excited about the project. "Opera. Football. A marriage made in heaven. Both full of passion, drama and charismatic stars."

The 2022 World Cup is due to take place in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December. The tournament has been dogged by controversies, including allegations of secret payments to secure support for Qatar's bid and human rights abuses suffered by the migrant workforce hired to build stadiums and infrastructure.

About 1.5 million tourists are expected to visit the Gulf state during the month-long tournament, although only 130,000 rooms are available in hotels, on cruise ships and at desert "glamp" sites.

Opera has increasingly tackled contemporary issues, including *Between Worlds*, about the events of 9/11, and *CO2*, about the climate crisis.



***Gods of the Game: A Football Opera* to be staged in Surrey and broadcast on Sky Arts**

The new production will coincide with the long-awaited 2022 World Cup

Tom Millward | Leatherhead | 24 January 2022



Theatre in the Woods at Grange Park Opera, Surrey
© Richard Lewisohn

A brand new football-themed opera will be hitting the stage and the screen next autumn, coinciding with the much-anticipated 2022 World Cup.

Gods of the Game: A Football Opera, helmed by Young Vic artistic director Kwame Kwei-Armah, will have a running time of 90 minutes – just like the game itself – and will be sung in English.

The piece is set to open at the Theatre in the Woods at Grange Park Opera, Surrey on 6 October 2022 ahead of a broadcast on Sky Arts, alongside Freeview and NOW.

Kwei-Armah commented: "Opera. Football. A marriage made in heaven. Both full of passion, drama and charismatic stars. I'm incredibly excited to bring this extraordinary idea to life at Grange Park Opera and on Sky Arts. Full casting will be announced in the coming months."

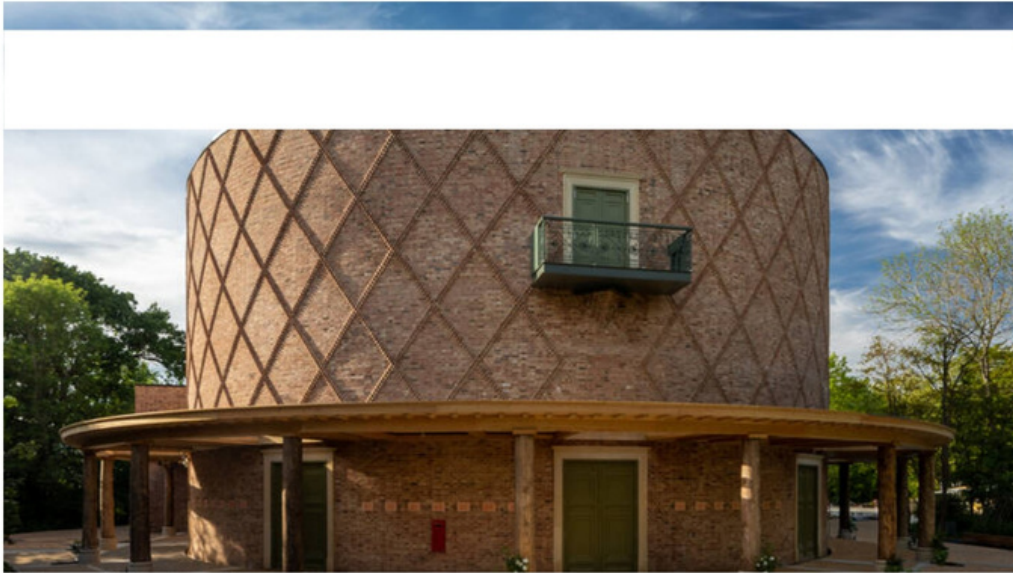
The creative team includes five composers: Julian Philips, Aran O'Grady, Ábel M G E, Blasio Kavuma and Lucy Armstrong, as well as writer and librettist Phil Porter.

The production also promises the world's first "footy fan chorus", a group of football fans who will be given a crash course in opera before filming scenes inside a UK football stadium, with the footage being used in the performance itself.

The plot follows two childhood friends and footballing legends who decide to front their nation's bid to host a World Cup tournament, only to encounter a world of bribery and corruption.

Produced by Factory Films and Julie Heathcote, *Gods of the Game: A Football Opera* was commissioned by Zai Bennett, Managing Director of Content for Sky UK and Ireland and Phil Edgar-Jones, Director of Sky Arts and Entertainment.

A broadcast date is still to be confirmed.



Photograph: Richard Lewisohn

There's an opera about football heading our way

Football's coming... to the stage



Written by [Isabelle Aron](#) Tuesday 25 January 2022



Football and opera might seem like an unlikely pairing but as we all know, the beautiful game *does* involve a lot of singing. Just think about the crowds of fans at the Euros last summer belting out 'Football's coming home'. (But don't think about flare bum guy, whatever you do).

Presumably, the calibre of singing will be somewhat higher at the new football opera that's heading to the stage and screen this year, to tie in with the 2022 World Cup.

Commissioned by Sky Arts, 'Gods of the Game: A Football Opera' will be performed in October at the Theatre in the Woods at Grange Park Opera in Surrey, and will air on Sky Arts, Now and Freeview shortly afterwards.

The show, which is directed by Londoner and artistic director of the Young Vic Kwame Kwei-Armah, is about corruption in the football world. It tells the story of two childhood friends who are now football icons, fronting their nation's bid to host the World Cup. They uncover a world of bribery and corruption... but presumably football prevails? And maybe even 'comes home'? The performance will be 90 minutes, yes, like a football match.

Not your ordinary opera, it will also include a 'footy fan chorus', which is exactly what it sounds like. They'll be casting a load of football fans who will be giving a crash course in opera so they can perform a 'specially composed chorus' in a football stadium in the UK. Footage of these opera-singing football fans will then be played on stage during the performance.

So if you're a football fan with a strong set of pipes, now's your chance to really put them to good use.

[The Globe has just announced its 2022 summer season, and it's looking Bardtastic](#)

[Shakespeare's Globe will hold open castings for the very first time](#)

[Isabelle Aron](#) Features Editor, Time Out London

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Sky Arts scores football corruption opera

Sky Arts has commissioned an opera about corruption in football which will coincide with the 2022 World Cup.

Gods of the Game is produced by Factory Films with Grange Park Opera.

Sung in English across 90 minutes, the opera will play to in-person audiences at Grange Park Opera, Surrey in October, airing on Sky Arts, NOW and Freeview shortly afterwards.

The opera will also include the world's first "footy fan chorus", a group of football fans who will turn their passion for the beautiful game into an operatic sensation. They'll be given a crash course in opera before performing a specially composed chorus in a UK football stadium. Filmed footage of the fans turned opera singers will then be played on stage during the opera as part of the performance.

Gods of the Game: A Football Opera tells the story of two childhood friends, now footballing icons, who join forces to front their nation's bid to host a World Cup tournament. As their campaign takes shape, they begin to encounter a nefarious world of bribery and corruption, overseen by the game's charismatic and all-powerful president. Enlisting support from the gods of the game, they set out to restore football to its rightful owners – the players and the fans.

Phil Edgar-Jones, Director of Sky Arts and Entertainment, commented: *"One of our aims at Sky Arts is to move beyond TV from time to time and help create work that lives in the real world, so we're really excited to bring this brilliant idea to the stage with Grange Park Opera, Factory Films and Kwame Kwei-Armah. Football is laced with all the drama you need for operatic treatment – heroes, villains, rivalry, joy, despair; it's all there and beautifully captured in Gods of the Game."*

The opera will be directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah, Artistic Director of the Young Vic, with music composed by the *Five-a-Side* composing team: Julian Philips, Aran O'Grady, Ábel M.G.E, Blasio Kavuma and Lucy Armstrong, with words from writer and librettist Phil Porter. The composing team will nod to several famous arias throughout the score, ensuring everyone will recognise snippets of the classics.

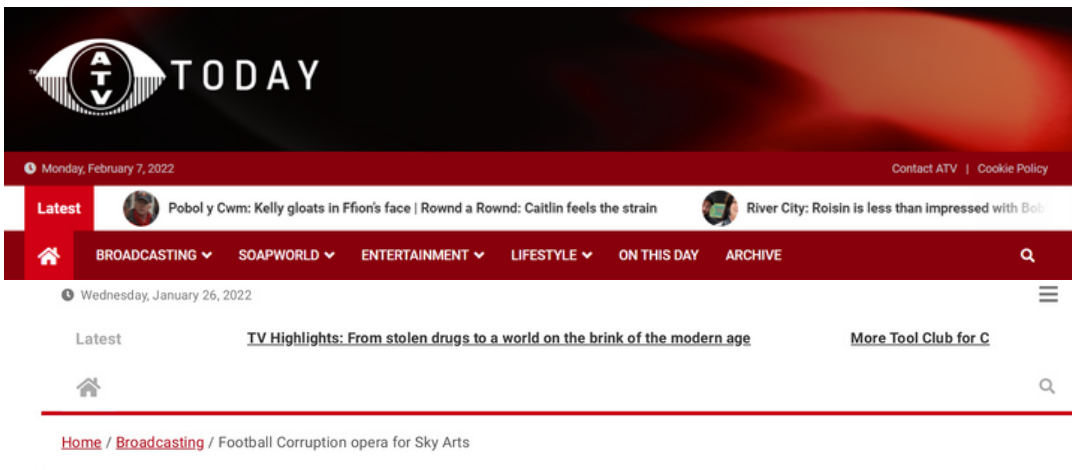
Grange Park Opera CEO Wasfi Kani CBE, commented: *"Wow, I've never watched a football match, now is the time to expand my horizons. I do understand the off-side rule but, at the end of the day, I need to brush up on my football clichés."*

Kwame Kwei-Armah, Director, commented: *"Opera. Football. A marriage made in heaven. Both full of passion, drama and charismatic stars. I'm incredibly excited to bring this extraordinary idea to life at Grange Park Opera and on Sky Arts. Full casting will be announced in the coming months."*

Gods of the Game: A Football Opera was commissioned by Zai Bennett, Managing Director of Content for Sky UK and Ireland and Phil Edgar-Jones, Director of Sky Arts and Entertainment. The Commissioning Editor for Sky is Benedetta Pinelli. Gods of the Game is produced by Factory Films with Grange Park Opera for Sky Arts. The Executive Producer for Factory Films is Julie Heathcote.

JON CREAMER

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BROADCASTING SKY

Football Corruption opera for Sky Arts



January 24, 2022 Mike Watkins

No Comments

Sky Arts has commissioned a brand new opera about corruption in football...

The singing of soccer sins will coincide with the long-awaited 2022 *World Cup*. Sung in English across 90 minutes – with no injury time – this celebration and condemnation of the world's most popular sport will play to in-person audiences at *Grange Park Opera*, Surrey in October, airing on Sky Arts, NOW and Freeview shortly afterwards.

Phil Edgar-Jones, Director of Sky Arts and Entertainment:

“One of our aims at Sky Arts is to move beyond TV from time to time and help create work that lives in the real world, so we're really excited to bring this brilliant idea to the stage with Grange Park Opera, Factory Films and Kwame Kwei-Armah. Football is laced with all the drama you need for operatic treatment – heroes, villains, rivalry, joy, despair; it's all there and beautifully captured in *Gods of the Game*.”

The opera will also include the world's first “footy fan chorus”, a group of football fans who will turn their passion for the beautiful game into an operatic sensation. They'll be given a crash course in opera before performing a specially composed chorus in a UK football stadium. Filmed footage of the fans turned opera singers will then be played on stage during the opera as part of the performance. The footy fan chorus will be cast in the coming months, so any fans ready to swap their boots for their baritone and their tracksuits for their tenors should watch this space.

Gods of the Game: A Football Opera tells the story of two childhood friends, now footballing icons, who join forces to front their nation's bid to host a World Cup tournament. As their campaign takes shape, they begin to encounter a nefarious world of bribery and corruption, overseen by the game's charismatic and all-powerful president. Enlisting support from the gods of the game, they set out to restore football to its rightful owners – the players and the fans.

Grange Park Opera CEO Wasfi Kani CBE:

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Gods of the Game: A Football Opera will open in the Theatre in the Woods at Grange Park Opera, Surrey on 6 October 2022 before airing on Sky Arts, Freeview and NOW.

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Sky Arts orders Gods of the Game: A Football Opera

January 24, 2022

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A new opera about football comes on stage and screen

January 25, 2022 by [Jnews](#)

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Not your regular opera, it will also feature a 'footy fan chorus', which is exactly what it sounds like. They will cast a lot of football fans who will hold a crash course in opera so they can perform a 'specially composed chorus' at a football stadium in the UK. Recordings of these opera-singing football fans will then be played on stage during the performance.

So if you are a football fan with a strong set of tubes, you now have the chance to really use them.

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Sky Arts commissions football opera

Published: 25 January 2022

Reporter: [Colin Davison](#)

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Sky Arts has commissioned *Gods of the Game*, a new opera about corruption in football to coincide with the 2022 World Cup.

The 90-minute piece will play at Grange Park on Thursday 6 October and will be seen later on Sky Arts (Freeview channel 11). It includes a 'footy fan chorus' recorded at a stadium—but not as publicity claims the world's first, this having been done for *We're not really here*, a 2017 folk opera about Manchester City.

Young Vic supremo Kwame Kwei-Armah directs the work written by Phil Porter, with music by Julian Philips, Aran O'Grady, Ábel M.G.E, Blasio Kavuma and Lucy Armstrong, who have scattered familiar snippets through the score. Let's hope there is no problem with Messi-sopranos in the penalty aria.

Related listings

[***Gods of the Game: A Football Opera***](#) - Phil Porter (Factory Films with Grange Park Opera for Sky Arts)