

PRESS RELEASE – STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM 27 MAY 2025

FOLLIES

FIRST CAST ANNOUNCED FOR THIS SPECTACULAR MUSICAL REVIVAL
AT THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE, BELFAST



Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by James Goldman
Produced Originally on Broadway by Harold Prince
Orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick
By special arrangement with Cameron Mackintosh
Presented by arrangement with Music Theatre International

Directed by Cameron Menzies. Musical Director Greg Arrowsmith
Featuring the Orchestra of Northern Ireland Opera

13 – 20 September 2025
Press Night – 13 September, 7.30pm

Northern Ireland Opera today is excited to announce the first members of the Cast for *Follies*, one of the most spectacular musical masterpieces of all time. With music and lyrics by **Stephen Sondheim** and book by **James Goldman**, this epic production directed by the renowned national opera company's Artistic Director **Cameron Menzies** (Nominated Best Director for Irish Theatre Award-winning show *Into The Woods* 2022 and Winner of three Paris Short Film Awards for film *Old Friends and Other Days*) will be the first time the show has ever been staged professionally in Northern Ireland at Belfast's Grand Opera House and marks eight long years since its last UK revival. The historic performances with a full-scale live orchestra will run from the **13 to 20 September**.

Set in New York in 1971, former showgirls of the famous Weismann's Follies' return with their partners to their beloved decaying Broadway theatre for one final reunion before it is demolished and turned into a carpark. Time may have moved on, but inside the theatre old connections stir, song and dance routines, laughs and loves are well remembered, rivalries flare and ghosts of the past are awoken. By the time they all leave their world's will have shifted: will anything be the same again?

The scale and ambition of this production is equaled only by its spectacular ensemble cast. Starring in the iconic roles of former roommates and showgirls reuniting after thirty years, Sally Plummer and Phyllis Stone, are renowned musical theatre and West-End stars **Anna-Jane Casey** (*CATS*, *JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOUR DREAMCOAT*, *GREASE*, *STARLIGHT EXPRESS*, *WEST SIDE STORY*, *CHICAGO*) who has performed in leading roles in countless West-End productions for over four decades and **Annette McLaughlin** (*PLAYER KINGS*, *SCANDAL TOWN*, *MATILDA THE MUSICAL*, *HARRY POTTER AND THE CURSED CHILD*, *CHICAGO*) whose extensive career has spanned musicals on Broadway to the RSC at Stratford Upon Avon.

Best friends Buddy Palmer and Benjamin Stone are played by Belfast's own **Mark Dugdale** (*COME FROM AWAY, JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, JERSEY BOYS, THE COMMITMENTS*) and much sought-after **West-End** star **Alasdair Harvey** (*COME FROM AWAY, BIG LITTLE LIES, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, GUYS AND DOLLS, SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, WE WILL ROCK YOU*) respectively. Both are highly experienced West-End actors who have appeared in an incredible roster of hit shows.

Music theatre royalty and one of the UK's finest jazz vocalists **Jacqueline Dankworth MBE**, cast in Sondheim's original West End debut of *Into The Woods* in 1990, returns to the stage in her first Sondheim musical in thirty years to play the role of Carlotta Campion, a character who arguably sings one of the show's most recognised musical standards 'I'm Still Here'. West End performer and TV actress **Allison Harding** (*INTO THE WOODS, NI OPERA; SISTER ACT* and Olivier Award winning *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET*) now based in Belfast, currently appearing in hit TV detective series *Ellis* plays Hattie Walker, the tough-talking, no-nonsense showgirl who sings the legendary showstopping number 'Broadway Baby'. Further casting to be announced shortly.

Northern Ireland Opera welcomes Music Director **Greg Arrowsmith** (*ROCKY HORROR SHOW, HAIRSPRAY, CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG, SISTER ACT, WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN*) to the creative team. This much-lauded Musical Director this year celebrates conducting his 21st West-End show in a career spanning 25 years. Arrowsmith will lead the Orchestra of Northern Ireland Opera, a full-scale ensemble of 35 local instrumentalists in this epic and highly entertaining production rarely staged due to its scale.

Rounding out this highly respected creative team is West-End Choreographer **Jennifer Rooney** (*INTO THE WOODS, ONCE, OLD FRIENDS AND OTHER DAYS, HARRY POTTER AND THE CURSED CHILD, THE JUNIPER TREE*) and Set Designer **Niall McKeever**. This show marks McKeever's fifth magical collaboration for the organisation which includes *EUGENE ONEGIN, TOSCA, LA TRAVIATA* and *INTO THE WOODS*. He was also nominated for The Irish Times Theatre Awards for 'Best Set' for *Into The Woods* in 2022.

Ian Wilson, Chief Executive of the Grand Opera House adds: *"We are delighted to welcome Northern Ireland Opera back to their home in September with an unmissable production of Follies. Mounting the first ever professional production of the Sondheim musical in Northern Ireland demonstrates the variety of work and ambition which Cameron has brought to the company over the past few years.*

"Beyond the company's annual grand opera on our mainstage, Northern Ireland Opera and the Grand Opera House produce a range of productions in the Theatre's Studio including, Morning Melodies, two sell-out evenings of Arias & Three Courses, and Cocktails & Cabaret which features some of Northern Ireland's best vocal talent. This autumn, to mark the Theatre's 130th anniversary, the two arts organisations will collaborate on a special, one-off event, the details for which will be announced soon."

Northern Ireland Opera's principal funder is the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Ciaran Scullion, Head of Music and Opera at the Arts Council, says, *"The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is proud to be principal funder of Northern Ireland Opera who continue to bring audiences here ambitious, thrilling productions and performances. Thanks to the hugely talented cast, musicians and creative team, Follies, in the stunning surroundings of the Grand Opera House, promises to be a spectacular show and I would encourage everyone to go along and experience this unmissable show this September."*

- ENDS -

Press Gallery with Cast Images and show artwork can be downloaded [HERE](#)

[PRESS NIGHT: 13 September 2025, 7.30pm](#)

Listings information:

Venue: The Grand Opera House, Belfast

Dates: 13, 16, 19, 20 September

Time: 7.30pm, 20 September (matinee 2.30pm & 7.30pm)

Prices: From £17.50 to £60 including booking fee.

Booking Link: <https://www.goh.co.uk/whats-on/follies>

Address: Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7HR

Box office: 028 9024 1919

Twitter: @NIOpera

Insta: @northernirelandopera

Facebook: @NorthernIrelandOpera

First Cast Announced

Anna Jane Casey	Sally Durrant Plumber
Annette McLaughlin	Phyllis Rogers Stone
Mark Dugdale	Buddy Plumber
Alasdair Harvey	Benjamin Stone
Jacqueline Dankworth	Carlotta Campion
Allison Harding	Hattie Walker

Creatives

Cameron Menzies	Director
Greg Arrowsmith	Musical Director
Jennifer Rooney	Choreographer
Niall McKeever	Set Designer
Gillian Lennox	Costume Design Associate
Nuala Campbell	Hair and Make-Up Designer
Margaret Barry	Orchestra Manager
Fraser Hickland	Repetiteur

Previous Praise for Northern Ireland Opera's work

Winner Best Production- Irish Times Irish Theatre Awards 2022 for *Into The Woods*. The only time a musical production has won this award in 30 years of the awards existing.

'Seriously good-looking' 4 Stars, The Stage, Lyric Belfast (Into The Woods, 2021)

'Storms along with such irresistible zest', 4 Stars, The Times, Lyric Belfast (Into The Woods, 2021)

'A tour de force' 4 Stars, Irish Times, Grand Opera House Belfast, 2024 (Eugene Onegin 2024)

'Thrills and chills in Northern Ireland Opera's stirring new production.' 4 Stars Irish Times (Tosca 2023)

'An intelligent new production from NI Opera of Puccini's masterpiece is full of vocal intensity' Opera Now (Tosca 2023)

'Northern Ireland Opera's La Traviata suggests that the artistic director Cameron Menzies has at long last realised the region's ambition to have a grand opera company truly deserving of the name.' Opera Magazine (La Traviata 2022).

'One of the Classical Music highlights of 2022' La Traviata ranked no. 2 in *The Observer*, December 2022.

'Opera at its Finest', 5 Stars. Opera Now Magazine, Dec 2021 at Belfast's Carlisle Memorial Church (*La Bohème*, September 2021).

Press enquiries and review tickets please contact Diana Whitehead at Fourth Wall PR

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Principal Cast Biographies

Anna-Jane Casey

Anna-Jane Casey is a versatile performer with over 40 years of experience in TV, theatre, and music. Hailing from Lancashire, she moved to London at just 16 to star as Rumpoleteazer in *CATS*. From there, she became a fixture in London's West End, appearing in the original casts of *Children of Eden*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Out of the Blue*, and *Grease*. She's performed iconic roles in *Starlight Express* (Buffy, Dinah, and Pearl), *West Side Story* (Anita), and *Chicago* (Velma Kelly), among others. Stage credits also include the title role in *Sweet Charity*, Sheffield Crucible, where she received a Best Actress nomination at the 2003 TMA Awards. She later reprised this success at the Crucible in Piaf. Other standout roles include Dot in *Sunday in the Park with George*, Menier Chocolate Factory, Maggie in *Hobson's Choice*, Watermill Theatre, and the Lady of the Lake in *Spamalot* at the Playhouse Theatre. More recent credits: *Flowers for Mrs Harris* (2016) and the West End revival of *Girl from the North Country* (2019-2020). She originated the role of Fraulein Fritzie Kost in the award-winning *Cabaret* at the KitKat Club/Playhouse Theatre and played Cilla Quack in *Mother Goose* alongside Sir Ian McKellen, winning the 2023 British Pantomime Award for Best Supporting Artist. Her extensive TV and film credits include roles in *Family Guy*, *Silent Witness*, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*. Anna-Jane has also performed with prestigious orchestras worldwide, including the Royal Philharmonic and the BBC Concert Orchestra. A frequent guest soloist on Friday Night is Music Night, BBC Radio 2.

Annette McLaughlin

Theatre: Natasha, Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812 (Donmar), Player Kings (Noel Coward); Box of Delights, Volpone, Love's Sacrifice, The Jew of Malta, Measure for Measure, Written on The Heart, Heresy of Love, Matilda (RSC); 42nd Street (Châtelet, Paris); Scandaltown (Lyric Hammersmith); Harry Potter and the Cursed Child (Palace); Pinocchio (National); Twelfth Night (Globe); Billy Elliot (UK Tour); Our Town, The Odyssey (Almeida Theatre); Apocalypse Meow (Southbank Centre); Brief Encounter (UK and Broadway); She Loves Me, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, 5/11 (Chichester); Chicago (Adelphi and Cambridge); Anything Goes (National and Drury Lane); Love's Labour's Lost (National) TV and Film: Professor T, Outrageous, Silent Witness, Holby City, Grantchester, Heartbeat, Legionnaire, Lunar IV and Law & Order UK.

Mark Dugdale

Trained at the Guildford School of Acting. Theatre: Handsome Stranger in The Necklace (Belfast Ensemble); Kevin T and Others in *Come From Away*, West End; *The Book Thief*, Curve Theatre; The Threepenny Opera, NI Opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Regents Park Open Air Theatre; Jersey Boys, Piccadilly Theatre; The Commitments (Palace Theatre); We Will Rock You (Dominion Theatre); Les Misérables (Queen's Theatre); Mary Sunshine in Chicago (Cambridge Theatre); Soup in Merry Christmas Betty Ford (Lyric Theatre); Chris in Have a Nice Life (Union Theatre); The Boy Friend (National Tour).

Alasdair Harvey

Alasdair is originally from Scotland and has built a diverse career across stage and screen. His recent theatre credits include *The Little Big Things*, *Come From Away*, *Pack of Lies*, and roles in *Mamma Mia*, *We Will Rock You*, *Side by Side* by Sondheim, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Putting It Together*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Carousel* and *Aspects of Love*. TV credits include roles in *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Taggart*, *The Bill*, *River City*, *Birds of a Feather*, *Sweeney Todd* and award-winning short film, *Courted*.

Jacqueline Dankworth

Jacqueline trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Her theatre credits: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, Royal Shakespeare Company. Stephen Sondheim's West end debut *Into the Woods*. *Merrily We Roll Along*, The Leicester Haymarket. *Uncle Vanya*, Les Liaisons Dangereuses. Screen credits: Tom Hooper's *Les Misérables*, *The Borgias*, BBC's "Jazz 625 Live: For One Night Only." As a vocalist, she's performed with The London Symphony Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2019, Jacqueline was awarded an MBE for her services to music.

Allison Harding

Allison trained in acting at The Arts Educational Schools and is an Actor Musician, born in Portsmouth and living in Belfast. West End Theatre credits: *Return to The Forbidden Planet*; Sister Act, The London Palladium (directed by Whoopi Goldberg and Anthony Van Laast); *Once*, The Phoenix Theatre. Other theatre credits: The Lyric Theatre Belfast: *Little Women*; *Alice The Musical*, *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*; *Pirates of Penzance*, Belfast Ensemble; Northern Ireland Opera: *Into The Woods Kiss Me Kate*; The MAC Belfast: *Cinderella*, *The Night Before Christmas*; *Into The Woods*. Touring Credits: *Sister Act*, *Blonde Bombshells of 1945*, *The Girls* (by Gary Barlow and Tim Firth), *Forbidden Planet* and *From A Jack to A King*. Film Credits: Disney's *Beauty and The Beast*; *Mama Mia 'Here we go Again'*. Television Credits: *The Bill*, *Nova Jones*, *London's Burning*, *Dalgliesh*, *Malpractice 2* and *Ellis S1*. She is currently filming *Ellis S2*.

Creative Biographies

Cameron Menzies

Award-winning director Cameron Menzies joined Northern Ireland Opera in November 2020. His career encompasses opera, theatre, music theatre, cabaret and film-making and his work has been seen throughout Australia, United Kingdom, Europe, South Africa, Japan and China. He has worked for Shakespeare's Globe, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Diva Opera UK, Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Short Black Opera Company, Malthouse Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra & Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He is a Helpmann and Green Room Nominated director and awards include the Berlin New Music Opera award (2011), Bayreuth Opera Award for Opera Foundation Australia and a Sydney Award in 2016 for the best direction of *Pecan Summer* Australia's first Indigenous Opera. Recent credits include *Cupid's Bow*, *The Juniper Tree* and *Sequins and Satire*, *Divas and Disruptors: The Wild Women of the Weimar Republic*, *Carnegie Hall*. The short feature film: *Old Friends and Other Days*, 50th Anniversary National Australian tour of *HAIR The Original Tribal Rock Musical*, *Sister Act The Musical* at The Vaults UK, *Fluid* and *Under the Covers* starring Courtney Act, *Lucia di Lammermoor* UK and Australia, *Yma Sumac: The Peruvian Songbird* starring Ali McGregor, *Tosca*, *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Bohème* *Die Sieben Todsünden* by Brecht/Weill starring Meow Meow and Strauss' *Salome* at the Palais Theatre. He has directed the world premieres of *Pecan Summer*, *Redfern*, *The Selfish Giant*, *CONTACT! A Netball Opera*, *The Grumpiest Boy in the World*.

Greg Arrowsmith

This year Greg will be conducting his 21st West End production in a career spanning over 25 years. These shows include: *The Rocky Horror show* (Playhouse Theatre, Peacock Theatre and Dominion Theatre), *Songs for nobody's* (Ambassadors Theatre), *Women on the Verge of a nervous breakdown* (Playhouse Theatre), *Hairspray* (Shaftesbury Theatre), *Shall we dance* (Saddlers Wells), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (London Palladium) and 9 Pantomimes at the London Palladium. Tours include *Chess*, *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, *Happy Days*, *Calamity Jane*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Shout* and *Sister Act*. Internationally Greg has worked on shows in Tel Aviv, Rome, Paris, Barcelona, Turin, Naples, Milan, Trieste, Toronto, San Diego, Sydney, Melbourne and Singapore. Greg has conducted various major orchestras most recently a season of performances of Rimsky Korsakov's *Sheherazade* with the BBC National Orchestra Of Wales.

Jennifer Rooney

Jennifer Rooney has worked as a choreographer for over twenty years across television and film (including *Derry Girls* (series 2 and 3), opera and musical theatre. Credits include Associate Movement Director: *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Palace Theatre London), *Once* (Coex Theatre Seoul), *Truth* (Helen Chadwick Company, UK Tour), *Once* (The Olympia Theatre, Dublin & Charlotte Theatre, Seoul). She has worked with Northern Ireland Opera on *Eugene Onégin*, *La Bohème*, *The Juniper Tree*, *Old Friends and Other Days* and *Into The Woods* at The Lyric Theatre in 2022 and His Majesty's Theatre, Perth in 2023.

Niall McKeever

Niall is an Irish scenographer and visual artist based in London, working across performance, film, painting and collage. He recently made his West End debut as Associate Set Designer for *Waiting for Godot* at Theatre Royal Haymarket. Recent theatre credits includes: *Making History* (Everyman Theatre, Cork); *The Brightening Air*, *Oedipus* (The Old Vic); *Waiting for Godot* (West End); *The Tragedy of Richard III* (Lyric Theatre, Belfast); *Eugene Onegin*, *Tosca*, *La Traviata* and *Into the Woods* - winner of Irish Times Irish Theatre Award for Best Production (N.I. Opera, Belfast); *Translations* (National Theatre); *Peter Pan* (Gate Theatre, Dublin); *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* - won the JMK Award - and *Yellowman* (Orange Tree); *The Dry House* (Marylebone Theatre); *Under the Kundé Tree* (Southwark Playhouse); *This Beautiful Future* (Jermyn Street Theatre); and *Into the Woods* (His Majesty's Theatre, Perth). Television and film work includes *Game of Thrones* season V – VII (HBO); *In The Earth*, *In Fabric*, (Rook Films); *LOVE*, (Cuba Pictures/National Theatre); *Dungarees*, (BBC/BFI). Niall was awarded the Max Rayne Production Design residency at the National Theatre in 2018. www.niallmckeeverdesign.com

Gillian Lennox

After graduating with a BA Honours in Fashion and Textiles at The University of Ulster Gillian Lennox went on to be a designer within the fashion industry. Throughout her career Gillian also continued with her own freelance work and has been a maker and illustrator for Universal Studios when they first came to Northern Ireland with films such as *Your Highness* and more recently was a maker for the film *The Northman*. For the Lyric Theatre, Gillian has supervised the Costume Department on all producing shows for the past six years and has been the Costume Designer for *Dr Scroggy's War*, *Good Vibrations*, *Alice: The Musical*, *Double Cross*, *Rough Girls* (Arts & Business Awards) *Dark of the Moon*, *Shirley Valentine*, *Peter Pan: The musical*, 1984 (Postponed Covid), *Sadie*, *Dracula*, *Pinocchio*, *Blue stockings*, *The Snow Queen*, *Romeo & Juliet* and most recently *Good Vibrations* 2023 which is now showing in New York.

Nuala Campbell

With a career spanning 15 years as a Makeup Artist, working on some of the greatest Fashion week shows in the likes of London, Milan, Tokyo and Paris and been published in many different magazines including Vogue. Recent works include the sell-out *Agreement* at the Lyric Theatre, *Good Vibrations*, *Propaganda*, the Award-Winning *La Traviata*, *Gap Year*, *Translations by Brian Friel*, *Into the Woods*, *This Sh*t happens all the time*, *La Boheme*, *Old Friends & Other Days*, *Rough Girls*, *Sadie*, *Kiss me Kate*, *Playboy of the Western World*, *Peter Pan*, *Driving Home for Christmas*, *A Street Car Named Desire*, *Good Vibrations*, *Shirley Valentine*, *Street Car Named Desire*, *39 Steps*, *Sweeney Todd*, *3 Penny Opera*, *Don Giovanni*, *Turandot*, *The Importance of being Earnest*, *The Little Prince*, *Jungle Book*. With numerous Awards under her belt such as, Winner of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce Award and the Aer Lingus Viscount Awards in the prestigious Pall Mall, Nuala went on to be voted one of Northern Ireland's Most Inspirational Women and one of Northern Ireland's Top 40 under 40 business people by Business First Magazine. Most recently Nuala was listed as Entrepreneur of the Year in the Ulster Tatler Influential Women Awards.

Northern Ireland Opera

As Northern Ireland's national opera company, we are the only professional company in the country producing full scale work on stage and which celebrates and platforms Northern Irish artists, for audiences from their local communities and beyond. We contrast this with nimble smaller scale high quality opera productions which we tour to communities across the country where there is low/no classical music provision. From teenagers experiencing their first opera, to those with a lifelong love of the artform; our critically acclaimed produced work engages audiences in a unique opera experience rooted in a country with a rich history of music. We are building a community of local and international singers, musicians and creatives and supporting them to develop their craft and progress their professional pathways. Our approach instils generosity as well as aspiration and collaboration as we draw on, invest in and contribute back to our local communities. We capture imaginations and provide the space and tools for people to explore their creative skills and potential. Every person who participates with us, whether as a member of our Northern Ireland Chorus Development Programme, a participant on a creative workshop or Skills Expo session, is given the personalised support which will enable the most impactful outcomes.

About The Grand Opera House

The Grand Opera House is Northern Ireland's Premier Theatre, and the only surviving Victorian playhouse in the country. With a stunning and recently restored Frank Matcham auditorium and a wide range of productions staged throughout the year, the Theatre is one of the best-loved and most important cultural assets in Northern Ireland.

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