



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## *News Release*

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### **PHOTO CALL**

**1PM, FRIDAY 13 MARCH 2015  
JOHN HOPE GATEWAY, WEST GATE,  
ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH, EH3 5NZ**

### **Pupils and artists make dream team for opera in park**

Schoolchildren and award-winning artists are to perform a new opera about the mysteries of sleep amidst the glasshouses and winding paths of a major city garden.

*Watching*, which runs 18-21 March at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, will follow two colourful apothecaries through the Land of Nod, encountering vivid nightmares and sweet lullabies as they try to cure a little girl's sleeplessness.

Photographers are invited to attend a photocall featuring a magical bed in the Gardens' glasshouse with children in Victorian nightgowns and magical animals creeping in the undergrowth.

The performance for families, which features scenes in various locations around the garden, is part of a project between the University of Edinburgh and Oxford Brookes University looking at how and why we sleep and is supported by an Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust.

The production aims to raise awareness of the links between children's sleep and academic performance. It also enables children from disadvantaged areas to participate in a world-class theatrical production.

*Watching's* score, inspired by music's effect on wakefulness, has been composed by Dee Isaacs, leader of the University of Edinburgh's Music in the Community programme.

Ms Isaacs and her students have been working with children from P4-P7 in Leith Walk Primary School to stage the opera and learn about the importance of good sleep.

Ms Isaacs said: "*Watching* has been an amazing experience, not just in composing the music, but in working with the pupils from Leith Walk Primary School and the students. Music is so inextricably linked to sleep - it can lull us and reach into our dreams. *Watching* will showcase music's power over our waking and sleeping lives as well as these children's infectious enthusiasm for performing an opera for the first time."

Schoolchildren will perform alongside professional musicians and actors. The glasshouses will be filled with sounds of the night from around the world and striking video installations. The production is directed by award-winning artist Gerda Stevenson.

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*Ranked among the top universities in the world*

*Watching*'s libretto has been written by Dr Katharine Craik from Oxford Brookes University as part of her research into the history of sleep and insomnia.

Scientists from Oxford have identified an increase in sleeplessness among UK children, owing to changes in eating and bedtime patterns, as well as earlier school start times and the use of electronic devices. Studies have emphasised a correlation between healthy sleep patterns and educational attainment.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the physic garden outside the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, the origin of the city's current Botanic Garden, was an important centre for early developments in sleep science. Plants and herbs from the garden were used to treat sleep disorders. Sleep science was a rapidly growing discipline and sleep was regarded as one of the core factors for leading a fulfilled life.

Dr Craik said: "*Watching* brings history dazzlingly to life, showing how the past can speak urgently to the present. Tackling some of the most important questions debated for centuries by scientists - Why do we sleep? What happens when we don't? - the project has profound implications for the way we live our lives today."

Professor Russell Foster, Professor of Circadian Neuroscience and Head of the Department of Ophthalmology, University of Oxford, said: "The *Watching* project is one of a kind. A thrilling exploration of sleep science through music, theatre and history, *Watching* promises to demonstrate the real impact that art can have on public health. The creative team are uniquely equipped to generate fresh interest in the vital yet forgotten question of sleep's crucial role in our lives. It is a pleasure to watch the project coming to fruition in schools, and at Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden, in 2015."

For more information on the *Watching* project, please visit: [www.watching.eca.ed.ac.uk](http://www.watching.eca.ed.ac.uk)

### **Booking information**

The performances of *Watching* will take place at 7pm from 18-21 March 2015 at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. Entrance via North Gate, Inverleith Place, from 6.45pm.

Tickets available through Brown Paper Tickets:  
[www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com)

### **Notes for editors**

The [Wellcome Trust](http://www.wellcome-trust.org) is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We provide more than £700 million a year to support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine.

Established in 1583, the University of Edinburgh is one of the UK's leading research-intensive universities and regularly ranks among the top 50 universities in the world.

Set in a historic student city, Oxford Brookes is one of the UK's leading universities and enjoys an international reputation for teaching excellence and innovation as well as strong links with business and industry. More information is available on the Oxford Brookes website at [www.brookes.ac.uk](http://www.brookes.ac.uk).

### **For further information please contact:**

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