

*"The music teems with energy and melody all the way through, occasionally incorporating glorious 'rebuilt' of seventeenth century music"*

Judith Weir

Master of the Queen's Music

# Kepler's Trial

an opera by  
**TIM WATTS**



Still from V&A production (2017): Gesualdo Six, Theodore Platt, Cerys Purser; video by Aura Satz; directed by William Ashford

*Denounced by her neighbours as a witch, Katharina Kepler is plunged into a crazed and corrupt legal process in this compelling historical opera by award-winning composer Tim Watts. Can her brilliant son, the famed astronomer, Johannes Kepler, save her from the stake? Or will Kepler's own imagination be turned against him?*

## BACKGROUND

**Kepler's Trial** is an innovative piece of music theatre, based on Cambridge historian, Ulinka Rublack's groundbreaking book *The Astronomer and the Witch*. Born from collaborative process that brought together host of scholars in many disciplines, the libretto distils its dramatization of the collision of science, religion and magic to tell a story with powerful contemporary resonance. Above all, it builds on Rublack's reconstruction of a voice from the margins of history – female, ageing, widowed, illiterate – using words taken directly from courtroom transcripts and allowing us to feel their emotional and moral force with all the visceral immediacy of opera.

Commissioned by and premiered at St John's College, Cambridge, its 2017 production as part of the Victoria and Albert Museum's opera exhibition was hailed as *'musically and dramatically compelling'* (Valeria Vescina, [seenandheard-international.com](http://seenandheard-international.com)). Writing in Opera Magazine, Alexandra Coghlan praised the *'wonderfully limpid'* orchestration, which weaves in parts for sackbuts and cornetts and *'nods to Kepler's age without getting bogged down in pastiche'*.

Further information about the project and past productions can be found at <http://keplers-trial.com/>

## PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

Kepler's Trial fuses elements of opera with a prominent role for chorus that recalls their role in Bach's passions. It lends itself to anything from concert performance to full staging. The original productions used specially commissioned video projections from Aura Satz (on a circular screen) to animate the visual dimension of Kepler's scientific work. These are available for use in further productions subject to negotiation with the artist.

The opera requires a cast of six seven roles and a minimum chorus size of eight singers, one of which may double as the seventh solo role. The score calls for thirteen instrumentalists.

### Solo roles

DAEMON - countertenor

URSULA REINBOLD - contralto

GOVERNOR EINHORN/MAGISTRATE – bass-baritone

KATHARINA KEPLER – mezzo-soprano

SCHOOLMASTER/GABELKHOVER – tenor

DOROTHEA KLEBL – soprano

JOHANNES KEPLER – baritone

### Chorus (minimum 8 singers)

The score includes sections for a five-part 'madrigal quintet' (Alto, 2 Tenors, Baritone, Bass). In the V&A production this was performed by Gesualdo Six and supplemented by two sopranos and one more alto for the sections requiring full SATB chorus. The part of Dorothea Klebl was taken by one of the sopranos. In the first production full chorus sections were performed by a larger choir (St John's Voices). Either option is viable.

### Orchestration (13 players)

Flute; Oboe; 2 Cornetts; 1 Sackbut; Percussion (tambourine, tam-tam, crotales, glockenspiel – 1 player); Organ/Harpsichord (1 player); 4 Violins; Cello

### Performance Materials

Vocal scores are available from <http://keplers-trial.com/>

Full scores and parts are available directly from the composer who is happy to answer questions from individuals and companies interested in performing Kepler's Trial.

Please contact Tim Watts at [tjw33@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tjw33@cam.ac.uk)