



■ CENTRE STAGE: Clockwise from top, W11 Opera's productions through the ages with *Antiphony* (2005), their debut *Noye's Fludde* (1971), *Bel & The Dragon* (1985), *Ulysses* (1987) and *Raindance* (2010)

40opera!

The W11 Opera company celebrate their birthday with another stellar cast of young people telling a touching tale of family life

FORTY years after the W11 Opera company staged its first show at St James Church in Holland Park the troupe comes to Hammersmith's Riverside Studios. Founded in 1971 by local parents – most notably music teacher Serena Hughes and conductor Nicholas Kraemer – who wished to create an opera for young people each Christmas. And Serena recalls that when she was asked to help

she said impulsively: "Yes, if it's Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde*. But I had no idea what a vast enterprise it would prove to be." That decision has led to the company commission and produce more than 30 new operas – more than any other UK group – and has created a theatre company exclusively for young people aged nine to 18. And the experience certainly paid off for a 13-year-old Hammersmith resident (and future pop star) named Sophie Ellis-Bextor, who first performed in the company's production of *Antiphony* in 1992. On Saturday and Sunday (December 3-4), the W11 Opera company brings their birthday bash to Riverside Studios as they present their



new opera *Original Features*. Composed by Julian Grant with a libretto by Cristina Jones (the creators of 2007's acclaimed *Shadowtracks*), the opera sees the 80-strong cast of young people travel back in time to the Depression-ravaged England of 1920. Two young artists raising their seven children in a faded Georgian townhouse are forced to seek their fortune in America. And the children are left under the austere care of sinister distant cousins. It examines a relevant moment in the country's social history, and it's also touching story of family life. ■ W11 Opera present *Original Features* at Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, W6. December 3-4 at both 3.30pm and 7pm. Tickets from £10-£15. 70mins – no interval. For more details, visit: www.w11opera.org

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