

Casting now complete for the World Premiere of Lionel Bart's last great musical, Quasimodo

Casting is now complete for *Quasimodo*, the last great unproduced musical by *Oliver!* composer Lionel Bart, which is getting its World Premiere, 50 years after it was written.

In a major coup for the King's Head Theatre in London, *Quasimodo* will play for a 4-week season from Wednesday 20 March - Saturday 13 April.

Press night is Friday March 22 at 7.15pm

Steven Webb will play the title role of Quasimodo, the tragic Parisian hunchback, deafened by the bells of Notre Dame. Steven has appeared in the West End several times, playing Posner in Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* at the National Theatre and Wyndhams, starring in the musical *Betwixt!* at Trafalgar Studios, and appeared in the title role in Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* at the London Palladium as a child actor in 1999.

Director Robert Chevara said of the hunt for Quasimodo, which included open auditions: "We need a young man who has the vulnerability of Charles Laughton and the animal magnetism of a young Tom Hardy, but who can also sing like Tom Jones. Quasimodo is the most complex character in Lionel Bart's most ambitious score. Like The Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera*, Quasimodo is an iconic role. He is like a young bull and the part is incredibly physically and emotionally demanding. He must be able to embody the isolation of the total outsider, with whom Lionel Bart identified and have the duality of both ferocious power but also a child-like inner joy. His scenes with Esmeralda fizz with sexuality and electricity and as in *Beauty and the Beast*, the audience should question their prejudice of what being ugly, or beautiful, really means."

Esmeralda will be played by Zoe George, who appeared as Martha in the Welsh National Theatre production of *Spring Awakening* and also appeared in the musical *The Last 5 Years*. Helen Sheals took over as Mrs Wire in Robert Chevara's *Vieux Carré* at Charing Cross Theatre and scored a huge success. The rest of the cast are: Iestyn Arwel, Melanie Bright, James Hume, Sean Paul Jenkinson, James Wolstenholme.

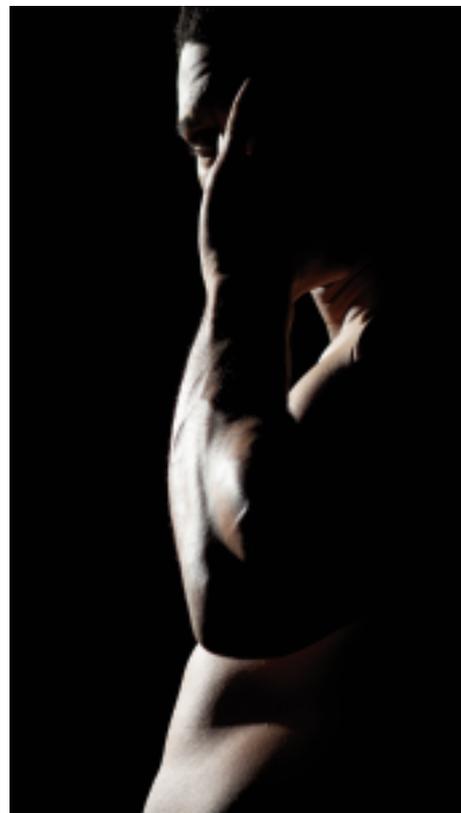
Lionel Bart wrote the words and music for *Quasimodo*, based on Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *Notre Dame de Paris*, in 1963. It was hoped that the poignant tale, set in 15th-century Paris, of the love between the deformed bellringer and the beautiful gypsy girl Esmeralda would make it to the West End and Broadway, where it would have joined the list of Bart's stage hits: *Lock Up Your Daughters*, *Fings Ain't Wot They Used t'Be*, *Oliver!*, *Blitz!* and *Maggie May*. But it was never produced in his lifetime. A semi-staged workshop for investors and producers in 1995 at the Soho Laundry was the nearest it came to the West End. That featured Tony Award-winning Frances Ruffelle as Esmeralda, Ray Shell (currently playing the manager in *The Bodyguard*) as Quasimodo and Peter Straker. A recording of that workshop still exists with Lionel himself playing the piano.

Lionel Bart said at the time of the workshop: "I've been fascinated by this story since I saw Charles Laughton as the hunchback in the 1939 film. I was inspired by the story of this marvellous soul within a monstrous body. But in the original story the hunchback is only 18 - not Charles Laughton at all. Esmeralda is 16, a street kid. With the obsession of the priest, Frolo, who is the hunchback's mentor, it suddenly came together as an involved, modern, dark subject. The simple premise of the piece, when I wrote it, was the question, 'What is ugly?' I hoped that you could realise, when you left the theatre, that the guy at the end of the row wasn't so ugly after all. It's a tragic story, but about being free to change, free to renew oneself. In a way I became the hunchback. It's a great release and a catharsis for me to put it all in this work."

Director Robert Chevara scored a major success in 2012 with the first London production of Tennessee Williams' *Vieux Carré* since its West End premiere in the 1970s. His production won rave reviews, sold out the King's Head Theatre and transferred to the West End to Charing Cross Theatre. *Quasimodo*'s original book was by Christopher Bond, the British playwright whose 1970 play, *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, formed the basis of Stephen Sondheim's musical. Chevara has written new material, updating and modernising the book.

When Lionel Bart was six, a teacher told his parents that he was a musical genius. After initial success in the pop world, working with Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Anthony Newley and Adam Faith among many others, Bart won three Ivor Novello Awards in 1957, four in 1959, and two in 1960. In 1960 he was given the Variety Club Silver Heart for Show Business Personality of the Year. His greatest stage success was the musical *Oliver!*. It opened at the New Theatre (later to become the Albery Theatre) on 30 June, 1960 and received 23 curtain calls. It ran for 2,618 performances in London. It opened on Broadway in 1963 and ran there for 774 performances. The 1968 film version, directed by Carol Reed, won several Oscars, including Best Picture. The musical *Twang!!* in 1965 was a flop but Bart tried to prop up its failing finances with his own money. He then sold the rights to his past and future works, including those of *Oliver!* to keep himself solvent but he was forced to declare himself bankrupt in 1972. In 1986 he received a special Life Time Achievement Ivor Novello Award. Cameron Mackintosh, who owned half the rights to *Oliver!*, revived the musical at the London Palladium in 1994 in a version rewritten by Lionel Bart. Cameron Mackintosh gave Lionel a share of the production royalties. Lionel Bart died of cancer on Saturday 3 April, 1999 aged 68

The King's Head Theatre was London's first pub theatre since Shakespeare's time, founded in 1970 with 51 West-End and Broadway transfers to its credit. Multi-award winning Adam Spreadbury-Maher became the venue's second ever Artistic Director in March 2010, relaunching the venue with a revolutionary opera and theatre programme. Since 2008 Spreadbury-Maher's production company has become well renowned for staging world premieres and first time revivals of work by some of the most well-known and respected playwrights of the modern era including Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, Peter Gill, Nick Ward and Tennessee Williams.



Listings information

Quasimodo

King's Head Theatre
115 Upper Street
London
N1 1QN

Wednesday 20 March
to Saturday 13 April

**Press night:
Friday March 22
at 7.15pm**

Tuesday - Saturday
at 7.15pm
Sunday at 3.00pm

Saturday 13 April
at 3.00pm
and 7.15pm

Previews:
20 & 21 March:
all seats £10.00

Tickets: £15.00 - £25.00

Box office:
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