

# Migrations



“Shows WNO at its best”

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Tom Randle and Zwakele Tshabalala in *Treaty No 6*, part of *Migrations* by Welsh National Opera. Photo: Craig Fuller

Ambitious premiere that brings two composers and new librettists together in a remarkable achievement

Welsh National Opera’s *Migrations* is not so much one large opera as six smaller ones: but so well have they been fitted together under the direction of David Pountney and composer Will Todd that the episodes cohere convincingly as a whole. The experienced Todd brings a wide range of musical skills to scoring the piece – above all an immediacy in which considerable variety and sheer power make for a consistently engaging experience.

Dramatically, six creative teams have been brought together, one for each piece – some librettists working for the first time ever in a previously unfamiliar genre; yet each segment has something worthwhile to offer. The overall theme has never seemed timelier.

In the frame is racism, colonialism and the impact of climate change, explored with results that if occasionally (though rarely) veering towards the glib, are in broad terms thought-provoking and profoundly moving.

Featuring magnificent work from the joint WNO Chorus and the Renewal Choir community chorus are sequences dealing with the voyage of the Mayflower in 1620 – one programme note pointing out the ‘enormous and devastating effect’ this would have had on native peoples, another that even those peoples themselves may have displaced earlier inhabitants.

**Treaty Six** deals with the signing of a document back in 1876, which has led to the despoiling of vast tracts of land in Canada. **Flight, Death or Fog** narrates the tragic story of Pero, an enslaved person from the island of Nevis who also served a slave-owning family in Bristol.

**The English Lesson** shows refugees in a class, each with their own unique story to tell. **This is the Life!** (additional music by Jasdeep Singh Degun) is a partly amusing, partly shocking episode about the treatment of Indian doctors who came to work in the NHS back in the 1960s – introducing it with welcome and vibrant light relief is some Bollywood dancing (consultant Mohit Mathur).

Interspersed throughout is a depiction of the migration of birds, spiritedly realised by members of the WNO Youth Opera chorus – even if their final reprise feels just one too many. Overall, the second half is less focused than the first, with the appearance of astronauts on a mission to the stars at the end an apotheosis that does not quite achieve lift-off.

Yet the overall impression is positive. Strong individual performances from artists too numerous to mention make this feel like a success for both the ensemble and the company. There are no weak links.

With some 100 people on stage and some 60 instrumentalists in the pit, conductor Matthew Kofi Waldren is in secure musical charge of this vast enterprise. It's an ambitious project that will undoubtedly have achieved many of its goals as well as showing WNO at its best.