

# HGS U3A Topical Talks

MICHAEL JACOBS

HGS U3A is delighted to announce that noted art expert Dr Jacqueline Cockburn will be giving a Topical Talk on little known aspects of the life and art of Pablo Picasso on Zoom, 3pm on Thursday 17 March and that Dame Esther Rantzen will be giving the next Talk on 19 May. Her subject is currently a mystery, but the title is 'That's Life!'

The Talks are free to members of HGS U3A and those who wish to attend need to register on the Meetings page of our website [hgsu3a.uk/events](http://hgsu3a.uk/events). If you are not a member already and would like to join go to: [hgsu3a.uk/join](http://hgsu3a.uk/join).

Jacqueline Cockburn is Managing Director of Art and Culture Andalucía. She previously gave us a fascinating Topical Talk on the excellent Spanish artist Joaquín Sorolla. She runs residential courses in Andalucía, Southern Spain in the art and culture of the region. Jacqueline is a course director and lecturer at the V&A and also lectures at The Royal Academy, Christies Education, The Art Fund, The London Art History Society and The Arts Society. She has recently published 'A Taste of



Dr Jacqueline Cockburn

Art, London' (Unicorn Press 2019). Jacqueline is currently delivering lectures, study days and her own courses at [www.artandculturetravel.com/art-home](http://www.artandculturetravel.com/art-home).

Dame Esther has become a household name, appearing in more than 2,000 TV programmes including documentaries, talk shows, reality shows and quizzes; she played Dick Whittington in Bognor, is a regular contributor to the Daily Mail, the Times and the Telegraph and is author of five books including a history of Childline and one novel. She writes regularly for Third Age Matters, the magazine produced several times a year for the Third Age Trust, the umbrella body for all U3As. A creative producer as well

as a presenter, she invented the documentary series 'The Big Time' which discovered Sheena Easton, created the 'Children of Courage' segment of 'Children in Need' and invented 'Hearts of Gold' which ran for seven years, honouring unsung heroes and heroines. She rashly took part in 'Strictly', 'First Dates' and 'I'm a Celebrity'. She regularly contributes to 'The One Show', political and news programmes on many different topics especially those relating to broadcasting, growing old ungracefully, and to the abuse of children and older people. In 2010 she stood as an independent candidate in Luton South. See [estherrantzen.co.uk](http://estherrantzen.co.uk).



Dame Esther Rantzen  
(Photo: Churchill Retirement Living)



## Ester revealed

DAVID CONWAY

Purim, the Jewish festival which celebrates the Biblical story of Esther, begins this year on the 16th March – but the Suburb will get a unique opportunity to celebrate it three days earlier, when HGO gives the UK premiere of the 1774 oratorio *Ester* by Cristiano Lidarti, the first oratorio written to a Hebrew libretto, at the Free Church at 7.30pm on 13th March.

Purim has traditionally been celebrated by Jews with a pantomime, the Purimshpil, with Haman of course as the baddie and Esther and Mordecai as heroine and hero. Some have speculated that Handel saw the Purimshpil of the Jewish community while he was in Venice during Lent (as this was the only musical entertainment permitted in the city during those forty days), and that this could have been the stimulus for his own *Ester*, a masque of 1720 which eventually became his first oratorio in 1732. Handel's subsequent oratorios gained a large following amongst London's Jewish community; when a later work, *Theodora*, failed, Handel complained "the Jews will not come to it as to Judas Maccabeus because it is a Christian story, and the ladies will not come because it is a virtuous one."

This is the background to 'our' *Ester*. The Sephardi (Spanish) Jews of London had close links with those of Amsterdam. Known to both communities was the Italian Rabbi Jacob Saraval (1707-1782), an admirer of European art-music and acquaintance of the Mozart family, who is on record as having produced a Purimshpil in Mantua in 1757. Saraval produced a translation of Handel's *Ester* libretto into Hebrew, of which three contemporary copies survive: Teshuat Yisrael al yedey Ester (The Salvation of Israel by the Hands of Esther). The Amsterdam Jews commissioned a setting of this by the (Gentile) Italian composer Lidarti (1730 – c.1795), presumably with Saraval as intermediary.

But the score was lost and the oratorio never performed. It turned up over 200 years later amongst manuscripts acquired by Cambridge University Library in the 1990s. The text (Hebrew transcribed into Latin characters) seemed a mystery, but fortunately working at the Library at the time was a team transcribing Hebrew manuscripts, who were able to identify it. The Israeli musicologist Israel Adler, an expert on the music of the Amsterdam synagogue, was called in and made an edition of the work for the Israel Music Institute, which we are using.

Lidarti's delightful music is in the galant style, showing the influences of Haydn and of Lidarti's Italian predecessors such as Pergolesi. Scored for soloists – often with virtuoso arias – in the roles of Esther, Mordecai, Ahasuerus and Haman, choir, flutes, oboes, horn, strings and continuo, we will be performing it with period instruments. HGO (formerly Hampstead Garden Opera) and now a leading independent opera company, dedicated to advancing young singers, is delighted at the opportunity to return to its roots in the Suburb with the UK premiere of this charming work, with stars of our recent productions as soloists.

For tickets and further information go to [www.hgo.org.uk/ester](http://www.hgo.org.uk/ester).



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