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**For Immediate Release**

## **Chelmsford celebrates its role in the birth of broadcasting with a new radio play**

Chelmsford City Theatres is marking the centenary of Britain's first radio entertainment broadcast by streaming a new play about the remarkable Marconi Company tests of 1920.

One hundred years ago history was made in Chelmsford. On 15 June, the world's most famous opera singer, Dame Nellie Melba, was brought to the Marconi New Street Works to perform a radio concert. It was the first live entertainment broadcast by an artist of international standing and it revolutionised the world of entertainment. But Dame Melba wasn't the first woman to sing live on British radio. That honour went to Winifred Sayer, a young soprano from Chelmsford who sang in a series of experimental broadcasts run by The Marconi Company earlier that year.

*'The Power Behind the Microphone: The First Live Radio Entertainment Broadcast'* brings this astonishing year of radio firsts to life, just up the road from where Dame Nellie took the airwaves exactly 100 years earlier. At 7.10pm, international opera star Anna Steiger will step up to the microphone to recreate the concert given by Madame Melba as part of a radio play based on the story of that fateful night and the breakthroughs that made it possible.

The play is an original production by the theatre, many months in the making, which the creative team has brought together during lockdown. Cllr Marie Goldman, Deputy Leader of Chelmsford City Council says the story is too important to be left untold despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic: "These legendary broadcasts are part of the fabric of Chelmsford and it is so important for the city to remember how much was achieved here in 1920. A hundred years on, this play is a timely reminder of how much we owe the brilliant people who laid the foundations for the home entertainment we have today."

The play, which was co-written by Felicity Fair Thompson and Tim Wander, was originally intended for the stage of the Civic Theatre in a week-long production as part of Essex 2020 – a festival of science and creativity in the county. The constraints of the Covid-19 outbreak and the closure of the theatre forced a change of course. The actors will still appear on stage, but director David Streames has now adapted the script for radio so that the cast can perform their lines without having to get too close to each other.

The theatre's artistic director Ian Knowles, who has produced the play, says the new format is an apt tribute to Chelmsford's broadcasting pioneers: "Telling this incredible story without a

physical audience and under such shifting circumstances has been a challenge, requiring a lot of determination and flexibility. We have tried to channel the spirit of the original team who pulled off the Melba broadcast in June 1920, which didn't always go according to plan, and I think they will approve!"

An experienced group of actors have been cast, including Robert Daws, whose credits include *The Royal* and *Poldark*. Although they will be kept a safe distance apart, director David Streames says the story is in good hands: "I'm proud that we've been able to bring such a talented group of performers together for this play and whether you listen in on the radio or watch the video livestream – they'll bring this story to life. Anna Steiger has an incredible voice and her Melba will transport you back to 1920."

Chelmsford City Theatres will stream a video feed of the play to its [Facebook page](#) where it will also be available to watch after the live event. The first part of the play, including the recreation of the Melba concert, will be broadcast live on BBC Essex and the entire performance can be heard on Chelmsford Community Radio.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

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