The Northern Voices Opera project was an interdisciplinary PaR project which took place in 2014-7, and aimed to develop techniques whereby a Northern English accent could be heard in the operatic singing voice, and which culminated in the composition and performance of the chamber opera *The Arsonists* in collaboration with librettists Ian McMillan.

Context

Unlike theatre, operatic sung accents are dominated in the UK by an adapted form of Received Pronunciation; although some regional accents are occasionally used in Britten, for example, no Northern accented opera has been written.

Methodology and Outputs

The project sought to create and test new material based on the speech patterns and rhythms of northern English, and set a libretto jointly developed by the composer and poet Ian McMillan.

**Phase One** of the project consisted of a series of five workshops, including Omar Ibrahim, who premiered the role of the ‘Northern

Shepherd’ in Harrison Birtwistle’s 1986 chamber opera *Yan Tan* Tethera; Conrad Nelson, Director Northern BroadsidesTheatre Company; singers Zoe Milton Brown, Richard Strivens, Nick Sales, Tom Eaglen, and Sarah Helsby Hughes, poet Ian McMillan, and sociolinguist Philip Tipton.

It was funded by Arts Council England, and took place between July 2014 and March 2015. (Grants for the Arts £14710)

**Phase Two** consisted of the composition, rehearsal and performance of a chamber opera to be sung in a South Yorkshire accent.The Arsonists is a two-act chamber opera applying techniques developed in Phase One. Although some material in a few operas has exploited “non-standard” accents in English, this is the first time an entire opera has been written in a Northern English accent. The composition of the opera was sensitive to the speech rhythms and vowel content of Ian McMillan’s Barnsley-accent: recordings of Ian speaking his libretto were transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet.