F. You are going to read an article about opera. For questions 31 - 36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which You think fits best according to the text.

Opera today

Journalist Laura James meets three young composers of operatic works.

We're crammed in along one wall of a studio in London as two singers rehearse a short scene from a new opera. From a piano jammed between members of the assembled team, a pianist plays simple harmonies soon to be played by an orchestra. The singers sound lyrical, but hesitantly so, fixating on just a handful of notes: they are playing a mother and son struggling to communicate. It's moving to watch, even in this raw form — but it's also constantly evolving. Frustrated with the pacing, the conductor stops the singers mid-phrase. 'We've lost some reality now because it's become "opera",' she says. There are nods all round. Hang on a minute. We're in a rehearsal for a new operatic work and the conductor is wolT1ed it's sounding like opera?

Then I understand. She wants to avoid the age-old model of European opera as over-the-top melodrama full of improbable plot twists — the stuff that has long fed the genre's reputation for elitism, prejudice and all-round silliness.

When I arrive at the rehearsal, the performers are just speaking their lines, searching for an unaffected-sounding delivery, feeling their way through the human drama. The piece is by the composer Jane Peel. Peel leaves no space for timeworn clichés, and this seems to fit in with an emerging trend, which includes some repertory-ready works already playing at some of the great opera houses. line 10 line 11 line 12

'I only found out about opera as an adult,' says Peel, who holds a special studentship — Doctoral Composer-in-Residence — at the Royal Opera House in London. 'I came to it from contemporary music and then sort of went backwards.' I wonder whether being a relative newcomer has meant that Peel has partly sidestepped the pressures exerted by opera's long history — both its masterpieces and its elitist reputation. 'Working in an amazing building like the Royal Opera House, full of Photos of great singers and productions from the past, it feels nice to be part of that history — but I don't feel terrified by it,' she explains. 'I have no fixed ideas about what a good subject for an opera is. I'm more driven by intuition.'

Her opera is set in Montreal in Canada. It's one of the first operas to feature Inuit throat music, an ancient singing form of the Inuit people of northern Canada. It's a breathy, rhythmic sound, as far from classical European opera as you get. The cast includes an Inuit Singer, Eva Kattuk. But Peel is keen for this to be more than a compositional gimmick arousing attention, to ensure that the throat singing doesn't stand out like a 'decoration or oddity'. It should be integral and, to help her achieve this, she carried out extensive background research and preparation.

The Liverpool-based composer Julie Williams has 'nothing against classical opera'. 'I just don 't think it should be a historic genre,' she says. 'I like to look forward. ' Her opera *Satellite* is based on a science-fiction story by Edward Hanwell in which a person has been sentenced to indefinite solitary confinement on a space station for the crime of 'unwillingness to engage with other people'. 'The main character in my Satellite has both a male and female voice,' she says. 'They have this amazing duet sound. I've got a male singer with a deep bass voice but who can also sing high notes, and a wonderful female singer with an amazing range. Together they produce this unworldly, haunting sound.' It's a striking reminder that opera 's weirdness needn't be an obstacle. *Satellite* uses opera's vocal extremity as an expressive device, a means of marking out a character's difference from everyone else.

For Pippa Miles, opera is all about the power of the voice: 'There's a magnetism to it — there's something about people singing on a stage that I find irresistible.' One of her works, *Forest*, contains just two vocal roles — for a male tenor classical Singer and a female Singer who improvises. 'I love the energy that comes when you put those together," she says. Forest is 'a story about a man who makes a journey of self-discovery. He ends up in a remote forest.' Miles is fascinated by forests. 'They're alive, yet timeless, and I try to get at this in my music.' She is keen for people listening to feel immersed in the soundscape, and admits to a sense of panic because opera tends to be performed on a big stage and it can feel distant: 'Artists have got to reach people, to open hearts and open minds,' she says. 'Opera has to change.'

LIVEWORKSHEETS

31 What does the writer find strange about the scene in the studio?
A the extent to which the singers push themselves
B the reason for a sense of dissatisfaction
C the limited amount of space available
D the number of mistakes being made

32 Which words in the third paragraph echo the way opera is characterised in the second paragraph?
A unaffected-sounding delivery (lines 10-11)
B human drama (line 11)
C timeworn clichés (line 12)
D repertory-ready works (line 12)

33 In the fourth paragraph, the writer suggests it is fortunate for Jane Peel that
A she has been appointed to a prestigious post.
B she has only recently moved into the field of opera.
C she has had exposure to diverse musical influences.
D she has come to an ideal place to learn about opera.

34 In using Inuit throat singing, Jane Peel aims to
A make it feel like a natural part of her composition.
B show how it differs from more mainstream genres.
C stay faithful to the traditions that it comes from.
D ensure there is greater public awareness of it.

35 What particularly impresses the writer about Julie Williams' approach to opera?
A her determination to find singers who share her understanding of it
B the respect she shows for its technical sophistication
C her interest in combining it with literary ideas
D the way she exploits its unusual qualities

36 What problem does Pippa Miles think opera has?
A It often lacks genuine emotion.
B Audiences find it difficult to relate to.
C The themes it tackles are too limited.
D There's a reluctance to use its strengths.

LIVEWORKSHEETS