

MUSICAL NOTES

Number 15
June 2004

The Newsletter of Newtown Musical Theatre Company



Jackie receiving the prize certificate for the *Me & My Girl* programme

Me & My Girl Prize Winning Programme

We are pleased to announce that the programmes/posters for *Me & My Girl* received the runner-up prize in the Souvenir Programme category of the Western Region NODA competition. Congratulations to Ruth, Tony and everyone who contributed articles to the programme!



Magic of the Musicals

The planning stages for this show are nearing completion. This represents a huge amount of work by the team concerned.

Trial By Jury has been cast and will be directed by John and Anne, the original directors of what was Newtown Operatic Society's first ever production

John, Jackie and Kat have been responsible for choosing the songs to be sung in the Concert part of the show and the order in which they will be performed. They will shortly be inviting soloists as required. If you wish to be considered for solo work, please let one of them know.

The Concert part will be directed by John, Anne and Jackie who will each be responsible for one of three sections. John is principally responsible for writing all the infill material and links to songs. I believe songs will be grouped thematically.

Trial By Jury Cast List

Plaintiff Karen McMurdo
Defendant William Worth
Judge Michael Wakeman
Counsel for the Plaintiff . . . Mike Clarke
Usher. Andrew Bond
Bridesmaid Gwyrion Bond
Foreman of the Jury Mark Ward

Oklahoma!

The production team is in place for our Spring 2005 production of *Oklahoma!*

Marjorie will direct with Kat as MD. We are so lucky to have people of this calibre working with us. We are particularly grateful to Marjorie as she is "loaned out" to us by Newtown Amateur Dramatic Society (although those of us who have

worked with her over the years really think of her as "ours"!).

Oklahoma! is one of Marjorie's favourite musicals and she tells us that it is a show that she has always wanted to direct.

So we look forward to another sparkling production marked with her usual flair and style.

Marjorie's Thoughts on Oklahoma!

I am very excited at the thought of staging *Oklahoma!* next year. It has always been one of my favourites and I rank it up there with the greats *My Fair Lady* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Over the years I have frequently used the music in shows I have staged so it is very gratifying to be involved with the complete show.

This is a musical that, when it was first performed, created quite a stir it was totally different from what had gone before.

It is based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs*

and the author Lynn Riggs wrote in introduction "It is a radiant summer morning, the cattle are in the meadow there is a visible golden glow". This inspired Oscar Hammerstein to write "There's a bright golden haze on the meadow the cattle are standing like statues Oh! What a beautiful morning".

Richard Rodgers said "By opening the show with a woman alone on stage and the cowboy beginning to sing off stage we did more than set a mood, we were saying to the audience Watch out, this is a different sort of musical!!"

So that is what we shall be doing creating a mood and an atmosphere on stage of the wide open spaces and the simple open air life.

So we can all look forward to a very special and enjoyable time ahead of us in the "brand new state"!!

Keep on Singing

Our hobby is doing us good!...

Thanks to Penry who passed on this article, "LetThe People Sing", by Libby Purves in February's Saga magazine:

"Right: deep breath, free that diaphragm, shoulders dropped, the mouth wide, two-three and let it rip! This month's underrated pleasure is singing aloud.

It needn't be expert, or artistic, or all in the same key. You can do it softly, a lullaby to your fretful inward self; or you can belt it out like a sea-shanty. You might choose to do it in public at a karaoke night, or keep it as a private matter between you and your plastic duck and loofah. You may accompany yourself on the air-guitar, or just put a swing in your step (or your ironing). Or you may stand quite still, in a respectable congregation, and let your voice do all the work as you roar out a request to the Almighty to Forgive our foolish ways.

As long as you sing, that's the main thing. Singing raises the spirits. It's been proved by experts. It's been in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*: singing increases the heart rate, reduces tension and raises energy levels.

Researchers in Saskatchewan, Canada, discovered that when people sang aloud during their fag-breaks at work they could do without the cigarette. Brain experts say that singing releases serotonin, a healthy compound. But you don't need all that science: it's obvious.

Singing is natural to human beings, it connects with something deep inside us, regulates our breathing to a happier level, stretches our tense, cross necks and cleans out all the bad-tempered rubbish of daily life.

If only we weren't so inhibited we could cheer ourselves up on damp station platforms with a burst of *Old Man River* or, if we prefer, *Bat out of Hell*. In the privacy of our cars we can certainly sweeten the



Oklahoma! Newtown Operatic Society 1993

Top: the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus.

Bottom: the principals - standing left to right: Mike Clarke (Jud Fry), Philip Evans (Curly), Doug Skilton (Will Parker), Bob Burn (Andrew Carnes), Ian Hogg (Ali Hakim) - seated left to right: Chris Clarke (Ado Annie), Pauline Burn (Laurie), Nansi Ellis (Aunt Eller).



worst traffic-jams and prevent road rage with a verse or two of *Greensleeves*. As for breakdowns, in the days of my ghastly old Metro, many is the time that I have restrained myself from getting out of the car and beating it with a stick like Basil Fawlty by launching into a full-throated attack on the duet *Oui, c'est la déesse* from *The Pearl Fishers*. Try it: "Oh, c'est elle! C'est la déesse! Qui desce-en-end paarmi nous!"

Embarrassment, Britishness, the stiff upper lip, all conspire against us doing what comes naturally. But we should. Even a sad song can cheer you up: most of my disastrous youthful love affairs ended with me walking along a beach alone singing *Both Sides Now* "You were always on my mi-yeeend"! It always helped.

It all began, for our generation, at primary school. They put *Rhythm and Melody* on the Home Service radio and you sang along to *Widdecombe Fair* or I seem to remember a rather mysterious song called *Farewell Manchester*.

Then it was big school and assembly; in a dusty hall you stood fidgety and bored and sullen as the Head banded on about who had let the school down this time; but then you got to sing *Hills of the North, Rejoice*, nice and loud, and immediately, as the air filled your lungs and burst out again, life felt better.

If you were lucky you got plain song as well as chapel. Singing plain song (even the *Dies Irae*) makes you feel really good. Then there were the concerts - I still do a mean rendering of *Come Gentle Spring* and even a school opera. There was nothing then to beat being in a chorus line of more or less unmusical girls in drapery sheets having a real go at *Dido and Aeneas*.

But you leave school and it fades away. Unless you really can sing well, and join a choir and thus find the secret of true happiness, you come to assume that nobody wants to hear you. So, gradually, in a crowded world you forget to feel your need to sing. Perhaps you hum a bit, but never properly let go. I was lucky in that I started to go sailing, often in Ireland, where it is quite acceptable to belt out songs in the pub instead of the dull British habit of sitting around muttering while the jukebox does the work. If you aren't very good, you can compensate by knowing funny lyrics. When young and rash I used to sing *The Terrible Story of Biddy McGrath, Who Strangled Two Sailors with the Straps of her Bra*. Later, I stuck to joining in the choruses of *Black Velvet Band* or *The Wild Rover*.

On boats, singing comes naturally. I always know when I have completely bonded with a vessel, because I start singing a love song to it. Usually it is *The Queen of Connemara*, which has a gentle hypnotic tone and begins, "Oh, she's neat, oh she's sweet". There's nothing like being alone at the wheel, in the night, and crooning to your little ship. Unless it is having a baby to sing to babies are fantastically appreciative, and don't know when you hit a wrong note. The ideal audience.

The important thing is to keep on singing, whether alone or in chorus, through the mundane duties of daily life. It's better than Prozac by far. Shy types can sing along to records, creative ones can make up new words, those with a Bryn Terfel complex can walk up mountains and let loose a wild, thundering baritone. If you are a Christian, hymns are tremendous mood-raisers.

Stuck in front of the computer in my work shed, I sometimes break the solitude by going on to the internet, keying in www.cyberhymnal.org or hymnsite.com and singing the words on the screen while the tune is played on organ, bells or piano, depending on which you click. On cyberhymnal, you get a backing of angel choirs. I sound particularly good singing the lyrics of Charles Wesley's last hymn: "In age and feebleness extreme, who shall a helpless worm redeem?"

Well, maybe that's not to your taste. But there are always the great numbers from the musicals, or a blast of early Beatles, or the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Ah, go on. Go for it! Yodel, chant, intone, yowl, croon, emote, give it some welly. Let the people sing!"

Thanks, Penry. Don't we share just the best pastime? Even the Germans agree with us. I found this in the NODA Newsletter:

Singing is Good for You

Researchers in Germany are claiming that singing is good for you, mentally and physiologically.

Scientists at the University of Frankfurt took blood samples from amateur choir members before and after they sang Mozart's *Requiem*. After the singing, the

levels of chemicals needed for a well-functioning immune system were significantly higher.

A week later, the choir had to listen to a recording of the *Requiem* but not sing it. This time the chemical levels were not above normal. The researchers also found that the positive mood of the participants improved during the singing.

Their study is to be published in the *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*.

Down Memory Lane - 1

Remember *La Vie Parisienne*? Or, more specifically, our trip to Paris and the taking of publicity photos in the great Opera House of Paris, the Palais Garnier? Well, when I was reading Frederick Forsyth's *The Phantom of Manhattan*, his take on a sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*, I came upon the following description of the Opera House. I thought that those of us who shared that exciting morning on that sweeping staircase and in the glittering Hall of Mirrors might find this fascinating:

"The Paris Opera was conceived, like so many other great enterprises in life, because of a fluke. One evening in January 1858 Napoleon III, Emperor of France, went with his Empress to the opera in Paris, then situated in an old building in a narrow street, the rue le Peletier. An Italian anti-monarchist called Orsini chose that evening to throw three smoking bombs at the royal carriage. They all went off, causing more than 150 people to be killed or injured. The Emperor and Empress, protected by their heavy carriage, emerged shaken but unhurt and even insisted on attending the opera.

But Napoleon III was not amused and decided that Paris should have a new opera house with, among other things, a VIP entrance for people like himself, which could be guarded and remain reasonably bomb-proof.

The Prefect of the Seine was the city-planner of genius Baron Haussmann, creator of much of modern Paris, and he organised an open competition among all of France's most prominent architects. There were 170 of them who submitted plans, but the contract went to an imaginative and avant-garde rising star, Charles Garnier. His project was going to be truly massive and cost a very large

Diary 2004

Oct 1 - 2 *Magic of the Musicals*

Musical Theatre Round Up

Summer / Autumn 2004

Theatr Hafren

Rigoletto Mid Wales Opera 8, 10, 11
September 2004

Buttington

Ruddigore Directed by Hugh Stephens
November 2004

The Arts Centre, Aberystwyth

Singing' In The Rain 24 July - 28 August
2004

Grand Theatre Wolverhampton

Tell Me On A Sunday starring Marti Webb
21 - 26 June 2004

*Joseph And The Amazing Technicolour
Dreamcoat* 28 June - 3 July 2004

The King And I South Staffs Musical
Theatre Company 21 - 25 September 2004
Grease 8 - 19 November 2004

Birmingham Hippodrome

West Side Story BMOS Musical Theatre
Company 29 June - 3 July 2004

Crazy For You 19 - 24 July 2004

*Joseph And The Amazing Technicolour
Dreamcoat* 8 - 21 August 2004

Jesus Christ Superstar 26 August - 18
September 2004

Blood Brothers 18 - 30 October 2004

NMTC Committee

Chair	Jackie Titley
Vice Chair	Jim Evans
Treasurer	Jeremy Thorp
Secretary	Mike Clarke
Business Manager	Peggy Bound
Publicity Manager	Tony Crozier
<i>Committee Members:-</i>	
Vivica Flynn	Karen McMurdo
Mark Ward	
<i>Non-Committee Posts:-</i>	
Membership Secretary	Ruth Thorp
Librarian	Gwiryon Bond

fortune.

The site was chosen (where L'Opéra stands today) and work began in 1861. Within weeks a major problem occurred. The first diggings revealed an underground stream running right through the area. As fast as they dug, the holes filled with water. In a more cost-conscious age the builders might have moved the project to more suitable ground, but Haussmann wanted his opera house just there and nowhere else. Garnier installed eight giant steam pumps which thumped away day and night for months to dry out the saturated soil. Then he built two enormous caisson walls round the whole site, filling the gap between the bitumen to impede seepage of water back into the work area. On these massive foundation walls Garnier built his behemoth.

He was successful up to a point. The water was held at bay until he was finished at that level, but then crept back in to form an underground lake beneath the lowest of the layers of cellars.

A visitor even today can descend to these levels (a special permit is needed) and peer through gratings at the buried lake. Every two years the level is lowered so that engineers in flat-bottomed punts can pole around and inspect the foundations for possible damage.

Storey by storey Garnier's giant rose until he was back at ground level, then went onwards and upwards.

During the Commune of 1870 when the rebels were in charge, they used the shell of Garnier's building with his labyrinth of cellars and storerooms as a base for weapons, powder ... and prisoners. Terrible tortures and executions took place in those vaults far below ground and buried skeletons were still being discovered many years later. Even today there is a deep chill there that never goes away.

By 1872 normality had been restored and Garnier got on with his job. In January 1875, almost seventeen years to the day since Orsini had thrown his bombs, the opera house, whose conception his act had triggered, held its gala opening

It covers almost three acres, or 118,500 square feet. It is seventeen storeys from deepest cellar to pinnacle of roof, but with only ten above ground and an amazing seven storeys underground. Surprisingly,

its auditorium is quite small, seating only 2,156 opera-goers as opposed to 3,500 at the Scala in Milan and 3,700 at the New York Met. But backstage it is vast, with ample dressing-rooms for hundreds of performers, workshops, canteens, wardrobe departments and storage areas for complete theatrical backdrops so that entire sets fifty feet high and weighing many tons can be lowered and stored without being dismantled, then raised again to be installed when needed.

The point about the Paris Opera is that it was always designed as more than just a site for the performance of opera. Hence the relative smallness of the auditorium, for much of the non-working space is taken up with reception halls, salons, sweeping staircases and areas fit to offer a glittering venue to great state occasions. It still has over 2,500 doors which take the resident firemen more than two hours to check before they go home. In Garnier's day it employed a permanent staff of 1,500 (about 1,000 today) and was illuminated by 900 gaslight globes fed by ten miles of copper pipe. It was converted to electricity in stages through the 1880s."

Weren't we lucky bunnies to be allowed the run of that place? ... and I wonder just how many Japanese have pored over those photos they took of us as we exited the front door in full costume!!!

Down Memory Lane - 2

I am indebted to Sylvia for these two photos (*page 2*) taken of the Chorus and Principals the last time we did *Oklahoma!* in March 1993.

Don't we all look young! John was our Director with Justin Brook as MD. The show holds special memories for Chris and me as it was our first show with NOS.

Welcome

To new performing members Carol Braithwaite and Mara Musciano.
